

# Forum Dispatch



Newsletter of the Diggers' Forum

Issue No. 4 Summer 2007

Inform. Debate. Represent

## FORUM NEWS

We must never forget that the core of our ever-developing industry is made up of hardworking individuals protecting our heritage. In the rush to institute mechanisms for change, ranging from the new government Heritage White Paper through to establishing minimum pay levels, the role of those individuals is often overlooked. It may not be deliberate or intentional, but events can lead them to believe that circumstances are beyond their sphere of influence. This is when the industry needs to address and empower the hearts and minds of those within it. For those individuals constitute our unions, industry bodies and interest groups, expanding those groups with their presence, influencing actions with their comments and contributions. One comment, one letter, once brought to attention, can change the flow of events.

It is these individuals who show concern for their own futures. If they cannot influence their career, who will?

Who will govern individuals professional progress? When working within units, more often than not, the frequent absence of regular appraisals and prospects for career development can demoralize individuals and cause loss of dedication and focus. The articles in this week's newsletter on training and health and safety hope to emphasise that the power lies within the individual, first through knowledge, then through action.

This is supported by articles from Kate Geary of the IFA and from DF members. Kate Geary's article will highlight how the IFA benchmarking scheme will address the issue of undervalued employees and how their financial reparations compare with other parallel industries. Plus, as usual, we round up the Forum Dispatch with all the recent newsworthy events.

## TRAINING FOR ALL

By G. Morley P.I.F.A (DF Training Officer) & C. Clarke P.I.F.A (DF Chair)

As most professional archaeologists will tell you, with regards to working conditions, pay is the holy grail of industry advancement. Most strongly agree that archaeologists deserve higher wages. In contrast, issues related to the provision and availability of training within the industry are frequently underestimated by many professional archaeologists as another route to advancement within the industry. Other parallel industries, such as engineering and architecture, prove that training is a powerful tool when it comes to professional and financial advancement. For those individuals with a wider skill set are more able to affect promotion, expect a wage rise, or impress potential new employers.

One of the messages arising from this year's IFA Conference at Reading was the importance of training, and that both employees and employers should have a greater awareness of its positive effects. Several sessions highlighted the future prospects for the industry, and they were in agreement that without a highly trained,

highly motivated workforce, the consequences could be dire. In addition to this, with an ever increasing quantity of literature out there, which includes the National Occupational Standards, it is easier than ever to identify training needs and paths of skills development.

Unfortunately, the situation facing most archaeologists on the ground is not so positive. This is an issue that is important to us all, and one which many units assign a low priority, citing issues of finance or scheduling as reasons to why it is not a feasible option. Units are frequently dependent on 'on the job' training, which can be a very viable method for individuals to develop key skills and experience in new areas. However, to be effective, such 'in-house training' needs to be supported by a structured training plan and experienced staff willing to oversee and direct the development of more inexperienced staff members. All too often this sort of training is informal, unstructured, and an excuse to send inexperienced members of staff to undertake greater responsibilities on a lower wage rate. Also, in situations where specific knowledge is required for the duties being undertaken, and where 'out of house training' is the most appropriate course of action, it is

all too often dismissed out of hand on grounds of cost.

The responsibility for training lies equally between the employer and the individual, but within the industry as a whole there needs to be a more positive mindset in regards to the importance of training. Even as individuals we must take greater responsibility for our own professional development. This may take the form of identifying skills deficiencies in the jobs we are expected to do, or identifying short courses, such as those run by Oxford or Birmingham Universities, to present to your employer as a suitable means of skills development. More importantly all training undertaken should be logged as proof of your skills development, ideally as part of a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme, something the IFA is currently promoting right across the industry. CPD logs can be used to demonstrate personal progression, illustrating not only your knowledge base but also the degree of investment in training that units are providing. It doesn't even matter if you move between units, because the CPD log documents your personal achievements, and should follow you throughout your career. Any situation in which you have acquired new skills or knowledge is valid to be included in a CPD log, whether this derives from reading a journal article or watching a more experienced staff member undertake a specific job, through to the attending of 'out of house' courses or conferences.

Because there are limited opportunities for those junior in the industry to access external sources of training, the Diggers' Forum is investigating the possibility of establishing short courses. Basic skills such as field recording, survey techniques, and finds recognition have been highlighted as being able to assist those starting out, to enable them to get a foot on the skills ladder. Some of the larger units already have training structures which allow a set period of time for career enhancement, and this is the environment where such courses may be given the opportunity to develop and to see if they are applicable and practical solutions. To make sure these courses are accessible to junior archaeologists, it is hoped that these courses will involve a minimal cost to the unit or individual. This 'Training For All' can be seen as a prototype scheme which may hopefully expand to include as many different courses as there are disciplines. Not only can this be seen as a starting point for those early in their career, but could also be used as a brush-up in techniques after the almost inevitable 'resting period' at some time in your career, or even as a taster session in something you have always wanted to 'have a go at'.

The IFA together with the Archaeology Training Forum have set up a new NVQ in Archaeological Practice, which was launched in May. I can hear it already...I've got a degree, why do I need something as 'low-brow' as an

NVQ. The answer is simple, this will demonstrate you can dig, and dig well. It is a practical qualification. A degree may be a good basis for understanding the wider schemes and theories of the archaeological world, but frequently it does not teach you the practical field skills that are required in the commercial industry. Those of you that have been in the game as long as some of us, will understand the old problem of slowly scaling the company ladder over the course of time and seeing some form of pay increase or promotion hove into view. Then you have to move to another unit and start the process all over again...some of us have been through that way too many times. This scheme is suitable for everyone, from the fresh-faced graduate to the hardened 'old timer'...if there is any doubt I am proud to class myself in the latter! It is a portable qualification that will immediately show employers your experience and skills. It's easy, nationally recognised can be worked on at your individual pace and what's more important...it's affordable! Gone are the management excuses of no time and money, here you can work on a qualification that will prove what you know and will enhance promotion prospects and it will all be done during work time with no bias between permanent and short contract staff. There is a possibility that this qualification or something similar may, in future, be integrated into degree level courses, so providing graduates with a comprehensive qualification in Archaeology, and not just a degree in the History of the Historic Environment.

Hopefully the implementation of CPD and participation in NVQ courses will help to raise the profile of company employee appraisal systems, the kind that often occur in the larger units. Appraisals allow individuals to be assessed on performance and knowledge and be able to make direct contact with the unit management and find out how the company view your development within the unit. Greater uptake of career structure tools like this may just help to bring the discipline kicking and screaming into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hopefully schemes such as these will prompt employers to see everyone's potential as an individual instead of as a disposable asset

It may have been noticed that I have made no distinction between permanent and temporary staff. This is because I believe that there should be none, if one unit invests in one member of staff who then leaves, it is sure they will at some time take on another member of staff who has received training elsewhere. A greater focus should be placed on the recognition and retention of highly trained and valued staff members, and that every archaeologist has his/her own values, skills and hopes and deserves a chance to develop them. By contributing to an individual's development, you are contributing to the development of the industry as a whole, and this is what units must keep in

mind if the industry is to advance, or even survive, over the next decade.

Too many good archaeologists have already been lost through disenchantment and a lack of being taken seriously...it's time we held on to you lot...you are archaeology's greatest asset and should be treated as such.

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## **BENCHMARKING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SALARIES**

By Kate Geary (IFA Training and Standards Co-ordinator)

The IFA first published minimum recommended salaries in 1996 based on the local authority pay scale, following recommendations from the Archaeological Employment in Britain working party. Since then, archaeological salaries have risen ahead of inflation but have continued to fall behind those earned by colleagues in comparable sectors such as engineering, planning and surveying. A quick trawl through a local authority recruitment website shows that the PIFA recommended minimum of £13,854 (local authority scale 2) is the going rate for posts such as clerical or admin assistant, waste collection operative and recreation assistant. The required level of qualification for these posts is around 3-4 GCSEs.

This year, the IFA has extended its minimum salaries to cover minimum standards for employers' pension contributions, holiday pay, sick leave allowance and working hours. We recognise, however, that the basic salary levels are still too low and have been seeking to develop a robust methodology by which to raise them.

The process will involve using established job evaluation techniques to benchmark a range of archaeological posts against posts in other sectors requiring similar levels of qualification, skills and experience. Because of the wide range of organisations employing archaeologists, the work will need to cover the public, private and voluntary sectors. The project will be undertaken by an independent consultant, working closely with IFA staff, and will be guided by a project advisory board representing SCAUM, Prospect, the Diggers Forum, the IFA's Registered Archaeological Organisations and Unison.

Progress will be reported on in future issues of the Dispatch and elsewhere. Final recommendations, including a timetable for staged implementation of any increases to the minimum salaries, will be ready for wider consultation with the sector by October 2007.

## **THE HIDDEN DANGER ON YOUR DESK**

By Chris Clarke (DF Chair)

Wherever the workplace, whatever the activity, health and safety has to be the number one concern for every archaeologist. Although we are passionate about the subject matter we deal with, it is not something we should be risking our lives for. An ignorance of health and safety matters will lead to a range of accidents, from minor cuts and injuries to severe wounding and death.

Every employer has the responsibility to provide a safe working environment for their employees, and employees have the responsibility of being aware of and avoiding the dangers around them and at all times. Dangers do not always appear in the obvious forms of twenty-tonne mechanical excavators or deep trenches - subtle ones can also hide in the office environment. Even field archaeologists have to return to this environment at some point, whether it be to clean finds, undertake data entry or write reports; and most of them are unaware that they are exposing themselves to a subtle set of dangers.

Slips and trips in the office environment account for some of the most numerous workplace injuries and resultant days off sick. Many injuries can occur over long periods of time - they can be caused, for example, by making use of ubiquitous computers, namely the Visual Display Units (VDUs). Whether they are being used for five minutes or several weeks, a simple set of guidelines need only to be followed in order to avoid the long-term health risks caused by using such technology over long periods of time. The government department that concentrate on these issues, the health and safety executive (HSE), have published advice relating to working with VDUs.

The types of health complaints often made in regard to VDUs are aches in the wrists, headaches, aches in the shoulders and back and deterioration of eyesight. These are not caused directly by VDUs, but the way in which they are used. Most of the advice given is common sense and greatly improves personal comfort while undertaking work with VDUs. The most important point is being comfortable in the work position, making suitable adjustments to the equipment. Regardless of whether employees are sharing computers on a frequent basis, it is essential that the chair, screen, keyboard and the mouse are all in positions that do not require straining at difficult angles. This means having good posture with forearms horizontal across the desk, making sure keyboard and mouse are in easy reach, and the monitor is easy to read at the correct angle and height. Most of all, it means taking regular breaks away from the computer.

Under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, employers are required to minimise the risks involved with VDU work by ensuring that workplaces and jobs are well designed. As part of this requirement the whole environment, including equipment and furniture, in association with the job being done, should be assessed. This could mean the introduction of suitable adjustable chairs and lighting and provide training and information on the best use of the equipment. In addition to this, employers are also expected to assess the need for breaks or changes in activities according to the nature and intensity of the work with computer equipment.

It has also been highlighted that use of VDUs, over a prolonged period, can make users aware of previously unrecognised eyesight problems. This can often be dealt with through adjustments in the position and setup of the monitor and surrounding lighting. If problems persist, employees can request that their employer pay for an eyesight test to check their vision. Should the eye test result in the need for glasses specifically needed for use with VDUs, then employers are also responsible for covering (!!) the cost.

Only the key health and safety issues relating to the use of VDUs have been covered in this article. More details can be found in the HSE leaflet *Working with VDUs*. This can be found at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf). The HSE website also contains far more information on both general and specific health and safety issues in the work place.

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## NEWS SHORTS

■ In February the Diggers' Forum, in association with Prospect, IFA, and BAJR, launched its new 'Campaign for a Living Wage', sending out posters and leaflets to units across the country. The prime aim of the campaign is to engage all unit managers (and their pay awarding bodies) across the country in a direct process of active wage improvement. This has initially been done by asking unit managers to agree with five key basic issues. So far the responses have been encouraging, and further movement on the campaign is expected to happen soon. For those who want more information, or copies of leaflets and posters, please contact Chris or Jez (contact details at the end of the newsletter).

■ The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary IFA Annual Conference was held at Reading between the 2 and 4 April, 2007. The DF ran their Training for the Future session on 4 April to a very positive and engaging audience. English Heritage kindly

sponsored the session, providing funds for a special DF bursary. Papers covering a range of topic including the new archaeological NVQs, to the activity of the Archaeological Training Forum and Prospects Union Learning Reps, were covered. Speakers were Kate Geary (IFA), Phil Richardson (CFA) & Hannah Cobb (University of Manchester), Dr Mike Heyworth (ATF), Chris Perry & Rachel Bennett (Prospect), and Natalie Kershaw (Archpeople Recruitment). A full session review will be available in the issue of the Forum Dispatch.

■ Prospect have relocated. Due to the growing constraints of their York Road offices, Prospect have finally moved to new purpose built offices....right next door. Their new address is: New Prospect House, 8 Leake Street, London, SE1 7NN. The new Prospect canteen comes highly recommended.

■ Spring has seen last year's growth in the IFA membership continue with an additional 80 members in the first 5 months of the year, growing to a total of 2,400 members. Of the new corporate members, 20 have been elected as PIFAs bringing the total number of Practitioners within the IFA to just over 350 – a welcome increase, although the IFA are still looking to encourage more of those who would qualify for PIFA grade to apply. In addition, there are also now 55 Registered Archaeological Organisations employing in the order of 1,900 archaeologists. More and more organisations are also paying or contributing to employees' subscriptions – this is an important way to assist those involved in fieldwork struggling to meet the cost of membership.

☐ If any of these News Shorts (or anything else discussed in the newsletter) has made you want to comment, question, or provide a perspective, then we want to hear from you. We are keen to publish material that generates further debate. Contact details below.

**! Please could Forum members and others on the Forum email lists, inform Jez Taylor if their email address has changed.**

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