

**THE INSTITUTE OF FIELD ARCHAEOLOGISTS: A SELF-PORTRAIT
to accompany the Stevens Report (*Statement of practice in comparable professions, John
Stevens Associates 1999*)**

1. Status and purpose of the Institute

The Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) is the professional institute for archaeologists. It was founded in 1982. It is a company limited by guarantee without share capital, and does not have charitable status (an application to register some or all of its activities as charitable is under review). It intends to seek a Royal Charter of Incorporation.

Its mission is to advance the practice of archaeology and allied disciplines by promoting professional standards and ethics for the conservation, management and study of the archaeological resource.

Its prime objectives are

- *to influence and inform actively through consultation with the legislature, public bodies and others, on matters relating to archaeology*
- *to promote an active professional organisation involving and offering appropriate services to its membership*
- *to develop professional guidelines and standards for the execution of archaeological work, and to establish those guidelines and standards by promoting membership of the Institute to all those practising field archaeology*
- *to promote the training of archaeologists in cooperation with other bodies and to encourage and monitor the provision of archaeological courses in education*
- *to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas about archaeological practice and to communicate these to the profession and more widely.*

2. Membership grades and profile

The IFA has 1433 members (c 33% of the profession). Members are based primarily in the UK: there are 27 overseas members in 15 non-UK states. Within the UK there are Area Groups: the IFA is considering alterations to the constitutions of its Scottish and Welsh groups to reflect devolution (there is no group in Northern Ireland at present), and redefining its English groups to reflect government regions. The IFA is building links with equivalent organisations in Europe (where they exist – the IFA is seen as the ‘market leader’) and to a lesser extent with North America.

Most professional sectors are represented in the membership: archaeologists engaged in monument management and fieldwork predominate, and the Institute is presently under-representative of Higher Education, museums, graphics and archaeological sciences. There are four Special Interest Groups.

The IFA makes no formal distinction between professional and technical membership. There are five grades of membership

- Corporate membership grades
 - Honorary Member (Hon MIFA): 10 members
 - Member (MIFA): 659 members
 - Associate (AIFA): 362 members
 - Practitioner (PIFA): 222 members
- Non-corporate membership grade
 - Affiliate (no postnominals): 180 members

Applicants for full Membership are validated against five Areas of Competence (AoCs). AoCs are entry routes, not subcategories of Membership, and therefore they are discussed below. It is recognised that a Member's competencies may change during his/her career: to avoid misinterpretation Members' AoCs are not publicised for the time being (pending the implementation of a CPD scheme).

There is no retired member grade, but special arrangements have been made regarding subscriptions for retired members.

The IFA has not developed 'overlapping membership' with other organisations. Members of affiliated organisations (eg the Association of Archaeological Illustrators and Surveyors) receive certain membership benefits and discount normally reserved for IFA members. The IFA is at an advanced stage of discussions with the Association of Environmental Archaeologists about professional validation of its members – effectively through applications to the IFA. The IFA envisages a wide range of cooperative structures and mechanisms to make the most efficient use of limited organisational resources in an excessively fragmented profession.

As part of the IFA's initiative to develop a professional career structure linked to vocational training, membership grades will be reviewed. The forthcoming project to map of archaeological roles and to correlate them with the types and levels of knowledge and skills will guide the review.

3. Entry to membership: qualifications and experience

Entry to Honorary Membership is by invitation of the Institute in General Meeting, in recognition of signal service to the profession. Honorary members may be drawn from any grade of membership or from beyond the membership. Most were already full Members.

Entry to other grades of membership is by application. Requirements for corporate grades are normally a balanced combination of academic qualification and practical experience. For example, full Members may enter by five routes:

- a relevant degree and three years' continuous experience of 'Member-level' responsibility in the Area of Competence (AoC) applied for
- a relevant degree and a total of four years' intermittent experience of 'Member-level' responsibility in the AoC applied for

- a non-relevant degree and five years' continuous experience of 'Member-level' responsibility in the AoC applied for
- a non-relevant degree and a total of six years' intermittent experience of 'Member-level' responsibility in the AoC applied for
- no degree but 'documented achievement totalling seven years'

Areas of Competence are

- archaeological field practice
- archaeological research and development
- archaeological resource management
- building recording and analysis
- finds and environmental study, collections research and conservation

Applicants must provide

- a completed application form
- evidence of academic qualifications
- a statement of archaeological experience (normally a selective but expanded cv)
- a portfolio of documentation demonstrating appropriate competence and experience
- names of two referees (for Member applications two referees are required for each AoC) – references are always taken up fully
- a signed declaration to abide by the *Code of conduct*

It is anticipated that the statement of experience and the portfolio will be supplemented or replaced by CPD logs and allied documentation (see below).

Non-corporate Affiliate membership is open to anyone who is 'actively involved in' archaeology and who commits to the *Code of conduct*. References are required

All applications are scrutinised by a Validation Committee of elected Council members. There is a formal appeals procedure – rarely invoked – under which appeals are heard by a separate Membership Appeals Committee.

There is no short-cut 'mature candidate route' (except to Honorary Membership). There are no age restrictions on membership. Members are not required to progress through the grades to full membership.

4. Continuing Professional Development

The IFA has advocated CPD since the early 1990s, and is now proposing to build it formally into its membership procedures. Initially it will be proposed that Personal Action Plans and CPD logs form the basic documentation in support of membership/upgrade applications, and that all members are provided with guidance and pro formas and encouraged to use them, with a specified minimum number of CPD hours annually or biennially. It is anticipated that PAPs and CPD will become mandatory requirements at least of full Members (potentially a mechanism for validating the continuing currency of an Area of Competence). Verification would be undertaken by calling in a (substantial) sample each year to assess compliance.

5. Provision and accreditation of education and training

The structure of professional entry requirements and revalidation of membership via CPD monitoring demands the provision of appropriate learning opportunities in archaeology. Although it may run courses from time to time, most recently in association with the ATF, the IFA seeks to stimulate the provision of appropriate courses through its published statements on skills and experience required for different roles in archaeology. HE and CE institutions will have an important role here, and the Institute wishes to encourage modular courses accessible by those in employment. Masters courses are not universally accepted as an ideal sole mechanism for attaining the basic skills necessary for professional practice.

The IFA intends to accredit such courses, but is still considering mechanisms. Much will depend on the sorts and scale of funding that can be attracted for this role, but criteria may include

- content
- teaching methods and quality
- placement quality
- assessment
- facilities
- practical experience and membership grade of course tutors
- organisational registration with the IFA

Currently the IFA does not accredit first degree courses, although it has agreed a core content with the Standing Conference of University Professors and Heads of Archaeology (SCUPHA). The IFA is participating in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) archaeology benchmarking exercise run through SCUPHA, and will shortly be issuing a draft list of minimum entry-level skills (as with other professions, 'entry-level' has yet to be clearly defined).

The IFA accredits Masters courses in archaeology. Essentially this is an exercise in assessing the practical content of courses, to see if the time spent on such elements can fulfil some or all of the 'experience' requirements for membership applications. In this way the process of accreditation relates purely to IFA membership requirements, but effectively a developed scheme would assess to what extent courses of all types contribute to professional qualification.

The IFA has recently established a Higher Education Sub-committee of its Professional Training Committee, to advise on these and other matters and to improve communication between the professional body and HE sector. Such moves fit well with the government's desire to ensure that degree programmes have a greater vocational relevance.

The IFA ruled out the option of running its own professional examinations early in its history, and at present sees little benefit in altering that decision.

6. Vocational Qualifications and National Training Organisations

The IFA has recognised the application of occupational standards in a CPD-based membership scheme. Although some transferable National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (N/SVQs) may have application, those developed for archaeology have so far not been formally built into the IFA's system of validating membership applications. This is because the demand is not there and there are strong doubts of the relevance of N/SVQs to professional archaeology – at least in their current manifestation. The IFA has submitted these concerns to the Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation's review of the N/SVQs in archaeology.

The IFA intends to redefine occupational standards/vocational qualifications in the light of the forthcoming roles/skills project.

Like other professions, archaeology has yet to benefit from any of the NTOs to which it has been ascribed in recent years. All have demonstrated great difficulty in understanding the nature of the profession, and their work has not addressed (and appears not to have recognised its concerns and requirements).

7. Costs and benefits of professional membership

Membership subscriptions for corporate membership are based on income and range from £12 to £120. From April 2000 there will be concessions for payment by Direct Debit. Within the income bands all corporate grades cost the same (except for Honorary Members, where the subscription is waived). Affiliate membership is also based on income, and ranges from £12 to £75.

The Institute had a turnover in 1998/9 of c £144,000 pa of which c 65% derived from membership subscriptions or registration fees (see below), with balance from grants, sales and earnings. Its capital and reserves amounted to c £72,000 at 31 March 1999. The Institute employs five staff (3.8 FTE), but intends to expand subject to resources. It is heavily dependent on voluntary support by members (perhaps 3 or 4 FTE).

The IFA provides a range of services and benefits commensurate with its size, including publications, conferences, jobs information, arbitration, professional advice and negotiated rates for a modest range of financial services. The Institute lobbies pro-actively for the profession and responds to relevant consultations. It hopes to expand its services. Its directory of members and Register of Archaeological Organisations – widely circulated to other sectors – provides a 'kitemarking service' to the public.

By developing appropriate services to non-members, and by expanding its 'outreach' activities, the IFA intends to promote wider public understanding and appreciation of archaeology and archaeologists.

8. Registered Archaeological Organisations

IFA membership is only for individuals. Organisations may register with the IFA if

- it formally resolves to conduct all its work in accordance with the *Code of conduct*
- the person(s) responsible for the organisation's archaeological work is/are a Member(s). The 'Responsible Post-holder' takes personal responsibility under the IFA's disciplinary by-law for the conduct of the organisation
- it satisfies the IFA, annually, that it complies with the *Code of conduct* and other regulations. Monitoring is by pro-forma: each year a percentage of organisations is inspected by a committee of peers

Registration is for one year only: organisations must apply annually. Where necessary registrations have not been renewed.

9. Conclusions

The conclusions of the Stevens report (chapter 12) are directly relevant to the archaeological profession and the IFA.

The IFA shares many of the characteristics, aspirations and problems of the organisations described in the Stevens report. With the exception of a mandatory CPD requirement it has in place the key elements exhibited by the more established professional institutes in other sectors. Generally the archaeology profession needs to build on what the IFA already provides rather than starting afresh. Its membership grades, entry routes and procedures are well-established and have been demonstrated to work efficiently, but are now subject to review in response to a changing environment and – at last – a more widespread professional concern with questions of training and opportunity. The IFA has a developing strategy for delivering with others – notably the ATF – an effective and accessible framework for training and career development in archaeology.

The IFA is younger, smaller and poorer than those referred to in the report (and the vast majority of all professional institutes). It clearly has lessons to learn from sister institutes. Fund-raising, marketing and closer cooperation with stakeholders within and beyond the profession (including support in kind) are therefore central to the IFA's business planning for the next five years. It is clear that a lack of resources will have a major impact on the rate at which archaeology's professional institute can deliver all that is so urgently required of it. This document could play an important role in closing the gap between the profession's aspirations and the resources it has to realise them.

Peter Hinton
1 December 1999