

9 September 2016

RE: CIfA response to National Housing Taskforce – Skills, Materials and New Technology call for evidence

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to this enquiry. We would like to use this submission to highlight the status of important skills not only in the construction sector, but also in supporting industries, such as archaeology. Development-led archaeology is part of the supply chain for delivering housing and other development and is subject to many of the same current skills-gap and skills shortage issues as faced by the housebuilding sector, particularly in the light of the huge boom in infrastructure projects scheduled over the next 15 years. This response details some of the current issues and sector responses, and highlights areas where government support would be beneficial.

About the Chartered Institute of Archaeology

CIfA is the leading professional body representing archaeologists working in the UK and overseas. CIfA promotes high professional standards and strong ethics in archaeological practice, to maximise the benefits that archaeologists bring to society, and provides a self-regulatory quality assurance framework for the sector and those it serves.

CIfA has over 3,300 members and nearly 80 registered practices across the United Kingdom. Its members work in all branches of the discipline: heritage management, planning advice, excavation, finds and environmental study, buildings recording, underwater and aerial archaeology, museums, conservation, survey, research and development, teaching and liaison with the community, industry and the commercial and financial sectors.

Background

There is a current skills gap in the archaeological sector, which affects both ‘commercial’ archaeologists undertaking archaeological investigation through the planning system, and local authorities, where restrictions on public spending and a lack of an explicit statutory duty to employ specialists in archaeology and conservation have resulted in a 30% decrease in staffing since 2006. With increasing workloads for both commercial and local authority archaeologists, these capacity issues are likely to be exacerbated in the coming years as the government invests heavily in a number of key infrastructure projects and seeks to boost housebuilding numbers.

There has been significant recent attention within the archaeological sector on the sector’s capability to deliver work required as part of large infrastructure projects, such as HS2, Thameslink, the A303/A30/A358 corridor, A14 upgrade and major airport upgrades. Recent figures from Historic England have shown that the sector is currently working at or near

capacity and is already dealing with skills shortages. However, the co-incidence of over 40 major infrastructure projects planned across the UK from 2015-33 mean that there is expected to be a need to grow the available workforce by 25 to 64% in order to service the archaeological needs of proposed projects¹². The peak co-incident activity lies in the period 2016-20.

The sector is making plans to address this shortage, through diversifying entry routes into the workforce and improving links with higher education institutions, as well as by creating new strategies for undertaking work on large projects. However, the market is likely to grow significantly before many of these projects begin to deliver results of the scale required. Further to this, uncertainly over possible impacts to the free movement of labour from the EU (which currently accounts for 5% of the UK workforce) at this critical time is potentially concerning.

Specific questions

- 1. Are current government policies and initiatives supporting investment in skills for the house building sector? If yes, please provide examples. If no, what more can be done?*

No. Whilst the sector has been successful in obtaining funding as part of the Trailblazer Apprenticeships scheme, there are issues which have limited the effectiveness of other government investment in skills. For example, the sector has been unable to access government programmes designed to support NVQ delivery centres, because the numbers involved in the archaeology sector are too small to qualify.

The small size of the sector is significant in imagining how government support could, potentially, be more effective at supporting investment in skills. For example, outside of the main large commercial practices (which, comparative to other sectors are themselves no more than medium-sized businesses), many contractors in the sector are extremely small businesses, for whom participating in apprenticeships or other schemes is difficult. If government support for these small enterprises was sufficient to enable involvement, it would make a considerable difference to issues of skills shortages in the sector.

Government could, in addition, lead the way in promoting apprenticeships as a viable sectoral mechanism for training local government specialists. Such specialists, at present, often exist in local authority structures which have no capacity to support succession planning – with many archaeology teams consisting of only one, or a small team of specialists who have no way of passing on local experience to new generations of Historic Environment Record curators or County Archaeologists.

This issue in local government is compounded by the current pressure on planning authorities to meet reduced budgets, which is leading to an erosion of the capability of local authority

¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/national-infrastructure-development-and-capacity-2015-33-assessment/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationally-significant-transport-infrastructure-projects/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-in-the-transport-sector>

archaeologists and conservation specialists to undertake their duties efficiently. In many areas officers are seeing a rise in caseload to compensate for reduced numbers, and in some areas authorities are choosing to do without specialists altogether.

Recognition that the coming decades are likely to see huge efforts to increase housebuilding should give the Government reason to expressly support local planning authorities and ensure that they are appropriately staffed and supported. One way to do this would be to attach a statutory duty on local authorities to maintain appropriate archaeological advice necessary to streamline decision-making and communication on development projects.

2. *Is the industry itself doing enough to attract and train people? If yes, please provide examples. If no, what more can be done?*

The sector is currently setting up new routes into the profession in the form of the Trailblazer Apprenticeship in Archaeological Practice which will be taking on its first applicants this academic year. This is in addition to the NVQ in archaeological practice which has been offered since 2009 at level 3, and for which approval for a level 4 qualification is currently being sought. The sector also widely endorses the 'Archaeology Skills Passport' as a training tool for practical education. The sector is continuing to benefit from Heritage Lottery Fund investment in the Skills for the Future programme, which is currently entering its second round, and which ClfA is pleased to note that private archaeological contractors will now hopefully be taking the lead in delivering in 2017. ClfA are also working with universities to develop courses which are accredited to provide professional skills for the workforce, although these courses are unlikely to be in place in time to deliver graduates during the expected high point of activity in the next 6 years.

There are continuing issues of pay and conditions in the sector which contribute to skills losses, and more could be done potentially to encourage improvements to contractual working arrangements in order to attract former workers back into the sector. Whilst this is a market issue and is therefore difficult to deal with directly, increased emphasis on this issue should be possible in a period where there is high demand for archaeological work. There is also a proportionately low transference rate from higher education archaeology degrees which better pay and conditions, at the same time as easier routes into the profession, would no doubt help to improve.

The sector also expects to use flagship cases like HS2 as an opportunity to adapt processes of working to increase efficiency, for example by re-assessing sector norms of preservation, investigation, and documentation, to ensure that available staff resources are effectively focussed on tasks which advance understanding or create public benefit. The process of challenging the norms of the industry, by seeking to measure labour productivity in terms of ultimate goals such as these will no doubt present a challenging debate in the sector, but is one which major sector voices are finding it increasingly difficult to ignore.

4. *One way to alleviate skills shortages is to have a diverse and inclusive workforce. How can the industry improve its diversity to fill the skills demand?*

As mentioned above, ClfA – along with Historic England and major archaeological employers – are investing in new vocational routes into the profession, through apprenticeships, as well as NVQs and other ongoing training programmes in order to encourage more diverse entry routes into the profession, as the majority of the current workforce are, de facto, required to have an undergraduate degree.

In addition, barriers to equality for women in the workforce are being discussed within ClfA, with programmes for tackling issues which promote gender inequality being developed. The sector also has a proportionately very low ethnic diversity which it is keen to work towards improving.

5. *The UK construction industry generally, and house building in particular, is reliant on a migrant workforce. In terms of skills, do you believe the house building sector will be affected by the vote to leave the EU? Please explain why.*

As the consultation recognises, immigration plays a part in meeting this labour demand. Although non-UK labour only accounts for 5% of the archaeological workforce at present, it is likely that this number will need to increase in coming years. It is concerning, therefore, that in the middle of this period of co-incident infrastructure projects and housebuilding growth that the UK is expected to be leaving the European Union, with no guarantee of how labour pools will be able to be accessed from Europe.

Like the construction sector, it will be important that the archaeological sector is still able to easily access foreign labour, either through continued free-movement obtained through any future deal with the EU, or through new immigration procedures which recognise archaeology as an industry with a need for migrant labour, with priority status for skilled and accredited archaeologists assured through visa procedures. At present, visa procedures for non-EU migrants makes it difficult for archaeologists to work in the UK, particularly now that strict earning thresholds are being applied to these workers.

It is possible that archaeology could be considered as a subsidiary profession to the construction sector for the purpose of this arrangement. Whether this happens or not, however, it is vital that some recognition is given to supporting industries, like archaeology, where they have the potential to impact house building efficiency.

9. *What barriers are there to long-term training and skills development? What incentives can be used?*

Continued problems with low pay and poor conditions has been a long term factor in the inability to retain skilled staff in the archaeological sector. These issues should be more capable of being tackled in a buoyant market for housebuilding and construction.

Some larger archaeological contractors are developing training programmes which could be subject to tax incentives in order to encourage expansion at higher rates. Projects such as HS2 could directly feed this development, although there is an extremely short window of opportunity to develop this in advance of the expected start of archaeological work for stage

one of the project. Nonetheless, the legacy incentive of such investment would ensure that ongoing work on HS2 will not impact capacity to undertake work associated with housing development in subsequent years.

In the short term, sponsored work training programmes for archaeology graduates could be put together and advertised in order to encourage a high rate of transference of graduates into the workforce and ensure that they have a necessary skills base within a few months of graduation.

We hope that this evidence, though subsidiary to the problems facing the much larger construction sector, is helpful to the review. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any further assistance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Hinton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Hinton BA MIFA FSA FRSA FIAM

Chief Executive, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists