

# An Archaeologist's view of consortiums

## A Summary of survey results

The Diggers' Forum (DF) were asked to participate in a session at TAG 2019, examining how modern practice has been shaped by environments within which archaeological work is undertaken. The idea was to examine how fieldwork is changing (or not) due to external pressures and our focus was on joint ventures/consortium working.

The full report outlines the results of the DF survey on consortium working, which are given and discussed within it. The survey did not ask for either the participants name or that of their employer, where these were given they have been removed to maintain anonymity.

The survey examines the differing pay and conditions between "core" company staff and those employed on contracts for consortium specific projects, and between the companies that make up the consortiums. Additionally, issues surrounding excavation and recording methodologies, training and development opportunities and project feedback are explored.

Based on the results of the survey a few recommendations are suggested not only for the greater success of future projects, but additionally for a more engaged and motivated workforce. The DF acknowledge that it will be difficult to balance all aspects for consortium projects, however it does hope that all employers will work towards the spirit of the recommendations. These include:

- Standardising pay and conditions (such as work hours, accommodation, sick pay, holiday pay calculations and access to "benefits").

Differences in pay and conditions between people working closely together for extended periods of time is a major factor in team upset, causing friction and unrest. Additionally, this leads to stress, mental health issues, and low morale. Ultimately the quality of the work being undertaken will suffer and staff become less engaged. Differences should not break the Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002.

- Clarification of job roles and associated responsibilities, including admin staff.

Every company has its own set of job titles/roles and associated responsibilities, these often vary considerably between consortium companies. The DF is not requesting an industry wide overhaul, but does recommend that it be made clear, in writing, exactly what the responsibilities and requirements of the various roles are.

The sheer size of the projects and the number of people involved puts strain on company HR and staff support roles. If field staff are unable to get in touch with their parent companies about admin related queries this results in extra pressure for site supervisory teams who may be unable to help, especially if they are employed by a different company.

- Standardisation of excavation, sampling and recording methodologies.

Given that consortium projects are for large projects that involve several sites, standardisation of the methodologies is essential for consistent data collection, and so your team knows what it is doing, even if/when they have to move to a different site. Spending time before or at the start of the project to make

sure everyone involved is clear on procedures will save time later when trying to compare sites and compile the report.

- Consistent training, development, and career progression opportunities.

Most infrastructure projects embrace training and development, some contractors pay for courses or run their own. Encourage your teams to take part in these, just because it is not necessarily archaeology related does not mean it is not valuable. Ask for time to put on your sessions and invite other contractors to attend. Make the most of these opportunities. Where training is available make sure it is open to everyone, you are a team after all. Have a training plan, Registered Organisations are already expected to have one in place.

Through its Code of conduct and published standards, CIfA insists that it's members shall only undertake work for which they are adequately qualified (Rule 1.4); shall have due regard for terms of employment and career development (Rule 6.6); and have a duty, not only to observe the Code, but to encourage others to do likewise (Rule 1.12).

Additionally, CIfA adopted the DFs statement on the minimum level of competence as policy. The minimum level of competence to be expected of any practising archaeologist shall be equivalent to that required for Practitioner (PCIfA) grade membership of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. Any employee who has not reached PCIfA level competence should be working within a structured training programme designed to develop their skills and competence to PCIfA level.

- Improvements to communication and feedback.

Talk to your field team, ask them for their opinions, keep them informed of what is going on. It is not much to ask but it does make people feel valued and included. Feedback works both ways and should be good as well as bad, encourage all members of the team to do it (not just the contractor safety forms) it will help them develop leadership skills. Acknowledge where mistakes were made and make improvements. Appreciate and celebrate wins, no matter how small.

This survey and its results are just a small start to a much bigger investigation into infrastructure and consortium driven changes, where more work is needed for a wider assessment of the industry. Several questions about change are raised in the full report, and whilst it is not within the DF's power to address them all we would like to ask the members of the Industry Working Group (FAME, CIfA and Prospect) and archaeological employers to discuss the issues raised and work together towards implementing positive developments, both in methodologies and staff training and engagement.

An additional point which we feel needs addressing is the adoption of more robust Health and Safety measures. During the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, it is the view of DF that site work should only be continuing where the site can be shown to comply with the H&S guidance provided by Prospect Archaeologists' Branch. This includes site specific risk assessments which identify and address the risks of virus transfer, improved site welfare and cleaning, appropriate site transport and adequate social distancing measures for all points of the working day. If a site cannot reach these standards, then it should be stood down until they can be met, and all efforts taken to ensure that standards are maintained. Staff should be informed of communication routes for reporting issues, and companies should engage with DF, Prospect and their own staff forums to ensure that information is appropriate and correct.

The DF would be happy to receive any comments on the report and to join in discussions about the issues and questions it raises.

