

2024 summary newsletter

Committee work update

Committee meetings were held this year online on 31 January and 31 July.

Additional meetings were held on 18 and 21 November to discuss a potential joint conference with the Human Osteoarchaeology Special Interest Group after they reached out with some questions for us. The response from us was positive, and we will be reaching out to the OsteoSIG after the FASIG AGM with our recommendations.

This year FASIG has also updated the competency matrix and the three-year plan to 2027. Once confirmed, these will be added to the Groups webpage for members to view.

Forensic Archaeology (with emphasis on England and Wales)

Forensic Archaeology and Forensic Science in general will be going through some interesting challenges over the next 2-3 years.

Regulation

October 2023 HOF SR saw the statutory regulation of forensic science in England and Wales with the statutory [Code of Practice](#). There was extensive work from FAEP Forensic Archaeology, however, in the end Forensic Archaeology was not explicitly covered or excluded. This also the case for forensic anthropology. It is a point of debate as to whether this is a good or bad thing overall. It does mean that currently there is no requirement for Forensic Archaeology to undergo UKAS accreditation.

The new CIFA Standards and guidance for Forensic Archaeologists is being finalised. The final update is complete and ready to go to consultation. The existing Standards and Guidance was last updated 2014, and at the time was endorsed by the then HOF SR. Click to view the [2014 Standard and guidance for forensic archaeologists](#) document.

The new draft will present an opportunity to seek endorsement from the new regulator. During the draft stages there were considerations from the regulators office whether they were going to endorse standards from external organisations.

We are in a new appointment and recruitment cycle for HOF SR (launched Nov 2024 with interviews scheduled for February 2025). The appointment of a new post holder will possibly change the environment in detail, but not the substantial direction of travel. The current post holder, Gary Pugh OBE, has seen through Forensic Science Regulator act 2021 and statutory powers, and explicit Codes of Practice. No doubt the new regulator will make their position clear in the early stage of their remit, and this will give Forensic Archaeology (through the EP) an opportunity to engage.

Forensic Service Providers

In our view, from outside the commercial world of Forensic Service Providers, there are some key issues.

With constraints on budgets, it is unclear at moment where this will leave scene based forensic science. This could impact not just archaeology, but disciplines such as blood patterns etc. This is variable from force-to-force area.

Currently in England and Wales there are two main Forensic Archaeology providers who currently provide the bulk of scene-based archaeology.

However, it is important we push for well qualified, experienced individuals operating within these niche forensic disciplines. This is one area where being outside mandatory regulation can be an issue.

In our view, both the regulatory and practitioner environment may be subject to change. It is important that we can support niche forensic disciplines.

Universities

The bulk of UK university funding has been hit by adopting a business model based around extensive international student recruitment. The last couple of years has seen a sector wide fall in international students. This has been influenced by visa restrictions, the ability to travel with accompanying family etc. While this has not been a massive hit for UK archaeology programs per se, the finances of most Universities have been impacted to a greater or lesser extent.

So far we have not seen Departmental closures from institutions with specialized forensic archaeology courses, however there have been two notable closures at Worcester and Sheffield.

Contacting the FASIG Committee

Please get in touch with us via groups@archaeologists.net if you have any matters you wish to raise with us.

Thank you for reading, and we look forward to continuing to work with you all in 2025.

Rob, Diana, Alexandria, Jennifer, Denise, Deborah, Peter, Madeleine, Aidan, and Sabrina,

The FASIG committee.