

Jobs in British Archaeology 1999

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Introduction

This year there have been a number of changes to the collection of the information, not least being the 'retirement' of Robin Turner who deserves much credit for setting the system up and collecting and reporting on the data for so many years.

This is actually the seventh year of collecting the data and for the first time the results may be compared with a more general survey of archaeological employment in Britain, *Profiling the profession*, which was published this year (Aitchison K, 1999). Although the two surveys use slightly different sorts of data, both have shown similar issues relating to difficulties in defining job types within a few categories and the collecting of data for excavation and site assistant posts (see below).

There have been two alterations to the actual collection and reporting of the data this year. Assistant supervisors have finally been removed from the collection process. No jobs were recorded for this category this year and only one was recorded in 1998. The role seems to have been subsumed into site assistant and supervisor posts. The second change has been the inclusion of a new category called 'miscellaneous'. This includes media, education and information dissemination posts, all of which have been advertised a number of times this year. They are on the fringe of traditional archaeology, often requiring experience or skills that are not primarily archaeological.

Job numbers

For the second year in succession there has been a significant increase in the actual numbers of jobs advertised, with a rise of 48% on 1998. There were also increases in each of the individual categories with the exception of field officer posts and unit managers, just one fewer of the latter. In the case of field officers, there was a 23% reduction, but if combined with supervisor there was a slight overall increase. Taken together with the 84% and 68% increases in the number of excavator and site assistant posts, this suggests it was a fairly successful year for field archaeology.

One of the main problems encountered when compiling the figures for the numbers of posts is establishing the precise numbers of excavators and site assistants. Many units are now advertising not to recruit for a particular site but to establish a pool of suitable applicants who can then be contacted at short notice when a number of 'possible' projects actually turn into 'definite' projects. This also affects responses to questions about lengths of contracts, usually based on their 'worst case' estimation but may then be extended. As a result the overall situation with regard to the numbers of jobs is probably even better than that reflected by the figures but conversely the turnover rate at the sharp end of the profession suggests that units are not creating many long-term permanent excavation posts.

Pay

The 1999 figures for pay reflect a number of trends in the wider economy, with both winners and losers. There were increases in the overall starting pay levels across the profession of 7% but that encouraging sign masks a number of less welcome trends. By far the most notable rise was at the top end of the profession with mean starting salaries for unit managers seeing a 53% hike when compared with 1998. Also, there were healthy improvements for senior and junior cultural resource managers and finds, environmental and conservation specialists.

Excavators and site assistants both saw rises of 8-10% in mean starting salaries but the minima were rises of a much more modest 2-3%. When all field jobs (excavator, site assistant, supervisor and field officer) are compared, there has been a mean salary increase of 3.9% on 1998.

The decline in the numbers of field officer posts suggests that supervisors are gradually replacing them, with the decline in mean salary levels (-3%) for field officers reflecting this. Since supervisors have not seen a rise in mean starting salaries, they have obviously not greatly benefitted from this process. An examination of the figures for project managers suggests that some of the field

officers have been promoted which is a very welcome development, but this (or other factors) has depressed project manager starting salaries, only 2% higher than last year and with a reduction of 4% on the highest starting salary. While finds and environmental specialists have seen significant rises in mean salary levels, illustrators have had no increase in mean salaries and the lowest starting salary is actually 6% lower than in 1998.

Low inflation during the current year (2.2% underlying RPI to October 1999) means there has been a genuine improvement over the past year but most archaeological salaries have failed to keep pace with the rest of the economy, where earnings showed a 4.5% yearly increase in September 1999. This suggests that for those starting at the bottom of the professional ladder archaeology has become even less attractive. Those further up the greasy pole have seen considerable benefits on the 1998 figures, possibly implying a widening gap between the two ends of the profession.

Private bodies

The decline in the number of posts being advertised by private bodies was reduced by 9% in 1999, although half of all excavator jobs fell into this category. Perhaps surprisingly the number of project managers advertised by private bodies experienced a decline of 16% and only the number of unit managers in this category increased greatly (129%).

Contract length

Virtually all contracts to field officer level were temporary but there has been a slight to moderate improvement with regard to most management-type posts. As noted above, mean contract lengths for fieldwork jobs are difficult to accurately calculate and although the figures show even shorter contracts for excavators and site assistants than 1998, the reality is probably a mean around the two month mark.

IFA membership

The long hoped-for takeoff in IFA recognition has not happened in 1999,

with just 31 references over the year compared with 20 in 1998, which means that the IFA is a factor in about 5% of archaeological jobs in Britain. This figure is distorted by the fact that no digging jobs mention the IFA (again) rather reinforcing the perception of the IFA as only being of relevance to those in more senior positions within the profession. On a slightly more encouraging note there was an increase in references to IFA membership for both finds and illustration jobs. Sadly, the advertisement for the post of chief archaeologist at English Heritage made no mention of the IFA, nor did any of the

other unit manager posts.

Accommodation

Although there was an increase, compared to 1998, this probably reflects the larger number of fieldwork jobs and was provided by only a small number of contractors.

Overall observations

There was a healthy increase in the number of archaeological jobs, compared to previous years, and a rise in mean starting salaries for most of the job categories. The jobs market was quite

volatile during 1999 a wide range between the best and worst jobs within each category and an overall range of starting salary from £8988 to £55,000. If the number of jobs continue to rise in the coming year it must eventually feed through into sustained salary increases but only if the length of contract also improves to create a real demand for archaeologists.

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REFERENCES

- ¹ Aitchison K, 1999 *Profiling the profession*
- ² IPMS *Negotiator* No 8, December 1999

Table 1 Jobs in British archaeology, 1999 summary (enhanced data: compatible with 1998 enhanced data)

CATEGORY	EXC	SA	SUP	FO	PM	J CRM	S CRM	UM	FEC	IDS	Misc	SUMMARY
No. of jobs	167	170	30	31	21	48	34	7	37	23	5	573
Mean starting pay	11311	11038	12700	13778	18671	14168	20655	35368	15476	13272	20282	13220
Min. starting pay	8988	9907	11838	11000	14250	9900	16233	20000	10642	9080	16719	8988
Max. starting pay	13438	12912	13144	16719	22998	22581	31620	55000	25000	20723	27500	55000
Achieve IFA min. pay	79%	68%	60%	45%	62%	71%	97%	100%	94%	78%	100%	74%
Private bodies	51%	15%	33%	61%	38%	15%	6%	29%	3%	30%	20%	29%
Temporary contracts	100%	99%	83%	61%	14%	49%	24%	14%	65%	52%	60%	79%
Mean contract length (months)	1.6	1.3	2.5	11.2	15.0	17.6	25.1	66.0	9.9	7.3	20.0	16.1
Mention IFA	0%	0%	13%	29%	24%	6%	18%	0%	5%	9%	0%	5%
Mention accom.	25%	10%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11%

EXC = Excavator; SA = Site assistant; AS = Assistant supervisor; SUP = Supervisor; FO = Field officer; PM = Project manager; JCRM = Junior SMR/CRM; SCRM = Senior SMR/CRM; UM = Unit manager; FEC = Finds, Environmental or Conservation; IDS = Illustration, Design or Survey

Table 2 Jobs in British archaeology: comparison of pay and job numbers, 1998-1999 (based on enhanced data)

		Mean pay			No. of jobs		
		1998	1999	Change	1998	1999	Change
FIELD POSTS	Excavator	10314	11311	+10%	91	167	+84%
	Site Assistant	10176	11038	+8%	101	170	+68%
	Supervisor	12732	12700	+0%	16	30	-88%
	Field Officer	14274	13788	-3%	40	31	-23%
	Project Manager	18268	18671	+2%	11	21	+91%
CRM POSTS	Junior CRM/SMR	12629	14168	+12%	40	48	+20%
	Senior CRM/SMR	17680	20655	+17%	19	34	+79%
	CRM/Unit Manager	23088	35368	+53%	8	7	-13%
SPECIALIST POSTS	Finds / Enviro / Conserv	13442	15476	+15%	40	37	-8%
	Illustr / Design / Survey	13229	13272	+0%	21	23	+10%
MISC		-	20282	-	-	5	-
Overall		12364	13220	+7%	388	573	+48%