Investigating the role of fieldwork in teaching and learning archaeology

Karina Croucher, Hannah Cobb and Ange Brennan
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1. Introduction

During the summer months of 2004 and 2005 the archaeology team of the History, Classics and Archaeology Subject Centre (Higher Education Academy (HEA)) carried out the most comprehensive survey of the opinions and experiences of archaeological fieldwork amongst archaeology students and staff in the UK. Our aim was to investigate perceptions and expectations of fieldwork in archaeology at undergraduate degree level in Britain. In this report we outline the background to the study and detail the methodology used – involving interviewing participants on site and gaining first-hand insights into their experiences. We also discuss the results of the 504 questionnaires collected, including a consideration of demographics, career options, relationships between fieldwork and the broader degree, issues of responsibility, and the education vs. training debate. We conclude with some recommendations for departments and staff, drawn from examples of good (and not so good!) practice, as well as suggesting further ways forward for research into fieldwork and education.

Throughout the report we refer explicitly to ‘fieldwork’ and ‘practical experience’. These aspects of archaeology can cover a myriad of tasks and practices, but for the purposes of this report we use these terms to refer to working on an excavation or survey, undertaking post-excavation analysis or completing lab-based tasks (see Section 4 for an outline of these).

2. Project overview

2.1. Aims of the project

- To investigate staff and student experiences and expectations of fieldwork within the undergraduate degree.
- To identify examples of ‘good practice’ in providing fieldwork as part of a degree.
- To examine the role that practical experience plays in developing the employability of all students, whatever their intended career paths.

2.2. Methodology

To meet these aims we undertook a comprehensive survey of staff and students on fieldwork projects throughout the UK, personally visiting sites and interviewing participants. The data collected was then analysed and the research formulated into this report and recommendations. Further information will be given on our methodology in section 4.

2.3. Dissemination

The main form of dissemination will be through the following written report. A summary journal article of this report is also currently in preparation. Preliminary results of this project have been presented at the 2004 TAG conference.
in Glasgow (Croucher and Brennan 2004), the Institute of Field Archaeologists conference in 2005 (Brennan and Cobb 2005), the 2007 TAG conference in York (Brennan et al 2007) and numerous subject centre events (Brennan et al 2005, 2006; Cobb and Croucher 2007; Croucher 2006). A Guide to Teaching and Learning in Archaeology, specifically centred on fieldwork practice, is also in preparation.

2.4. Intended audience

This report is important to archaeology departments and universities throughout the UK, especially in reviewing the fieldwork components of degree courses, and in aiding recruitment and retention. This is especially pertinent today as archaeology departments are proactively addressing issues of recruitment and the retention of students (Standing Committee for Archaeology (SCFA), pers. comm., Oct 07). This report is also relevant to programme leaders and coordinators involved in addressing fieldwork provision, as well as lecturing and supervising staff, primarily those running excavations, but also those based solely within the university environment, as this report recommends a comprehensive and integrated approach to fieldwork.

In addition, archaeological employers and excavators will find the information in this report relevant, especially in terms of their involvement with universities, academic departments, and recruitment of future archaeologists.

Current and potential students of archaeology will also find this report informative, demonstrating the diverse range of skills and attributes archaeological graduates can obtain, enabling a wider range of career paths and enhancing the potential employability of those pursuing an archaeology degree. Moreover, this report will demonstrate that archaeology provides the opportunity to gain a unique and distinctive set of skills that can be easily transferred into many workplace environments.

During our time conducting the interviews, and presenting our preliminary results, it has become abundantly clear that there is much for the discipline of archaeology to address; we have seen examples of positive and negative practices that we hope will inform staff and students alike. This report is intended to maintain a momentum of professional and academic interest in the role of fieldwork in teaching and learning archaeology, to communicate good practice, and to provide data for further discussion.

3. Background to the project

Recent archaeological literature has begun to notice that despite the recognised importance of fieldwork, little research has been undertaken into fieldwork processes and experiences. For example, Gavin Lucas, in the volume Critical Approaches to Fieldwork, discusses how despite theorising in the realms of interpretation, little is done to really analyse or examine how fieldwork is undertaken today (2001, 1-2) (although see papers such as Andrews et al 2000; Bender et al 2007; Hodder 1997; Lewis 2006 for examples of some accounts that have tried to address this issue).

While it is clear that there has, generally, been little explicit theorisation of fieldwork, even less research has been undertaken into the role of fieldwork in degree programmes. There have been valuable local studies undertaken (such as Brookes 2008; Thorpe 2004), however, there has not been a large-scale national project looking at fieldwork across the country until this current investigation was initiated.
The Subject Benchmarking Statement (QAA 2007, and see Darvill 2008 for a summary of recent updates to the Statement) recognises the important role that fieldwork plays in the undergraduate degree, for example the statement asserts:

“…much of the best teaching and learning in archaeology will be an interactive process from which students and academics gain mutual benefit because of the research-led environment for teaching. Students need to be encouraged to learn through experience, both as individuals and as members of defined teams, with practicals and fieldwork playing important roles in such provision” (QAA 2007).

Even with the QAA supporting the importance of practical work there still exists a lack of any real data on the fieldwork experience.

Given the centrality of fieldwork in the disciplinary culture of archaeology, its role in the undergraduate degree, and the education vs. training debate in British archaeology (see Aitchison 2004; Hamilakis 2004; Hamilakis and Rainbird 2004, 52; Dowson et al 2004; Stone 2004, 6; Rainbird and Hamilakis and references within 2001; Collis 2000), examining what students actually want from their degrees is vitally important. As well as being driven by the needs of archaeology departments and students, this project also arises out of a growing concern from archaeological employers that the graduates they are employing are felt to be inadequately equipped for a career in archaeology (Aitchison 2004) (this issue will be discussed further in Section 5.7.1 when the education vs. training debate, and the roles of universities and the profession, are returned to). Consequently it is hoped that through investigation into the role of fieldwork and vocational training through this project, a greater understanding of the debate can be reached, considering the positions, responsibilities and restrictions on universities, as well as the perspectives of students and staff on the issue of vocational training.

4. Methodology

To undertake a comprehensive survey that addressed staff and student expectations of the fieldwork experience, we decided we had to speak to both staff and students, rather than simply circulating questionnaires and/or reading course handouts. Interviewing people face-to-face would allow them to be more relaxed and forthcoming in their responses ‘in conversation’ rather than having to find the time to write down their responses on paper.

Once we had decided that we needed to speak directly to staff and students, the location was considered; should we simply speak to people whilst at university? Although we are aware that speaking with students and staff in the university environment does have its merits, mainly in offering a distanced perspective, for this particular study we felt that gaining immediate responses was preferable. Consequently, we felt that through interviewing in the field, students would not feel the same restraint placed on them as by the classroom experience (Figure 1). It is all too easy to gain a distorted picture of fieldwork once back at university, and whilst memories of the highs and lows may last, details of individuals’ thoughts, opinions and experiences in the field soon fade. We therefore felt that speaking to staff and students whilst actually on site would allow us direct access to actual experiences. Following this decision we advertised the project to all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offering archaeology in the UK and then responded to invitations from project directors to attend their excavations.
It quickly became clear that attending the digs in person also gave us the invaluable opportunity to observe more subjective data – the general feeling of the site, attitudes, and emotions – essential components of any dig that could be lost in questionnaires. We participated in the projects as observers, and as we are all archaeologists, could situate ourselves within the site or lab dynamic. Whilst our very being on site would have had some influence, it is hoped that our relaxed and informal approaches, and experiences of fieldwork, would enable greater acceptance and thus access to the opinions and experiences of students and staff. We could therefore pick up on the mood or ‘vibe’ of the site, observe how students interacted with staff, as well as ask more detailed questions if we thought it was appropriate (see Edgeworth 2003, 2006; Everill 2006; Holttorf 2006 in the use of participant observation in relation to research into professional archaeology).

HEA staff undertook site visits over the summers of 2004 and 2005, visiting a total of 32 sites, and speaking with 434 students and 103 staff (Figure 2), representing 25 UK HEIs, 9 Further Education (FE) and Continuing Education (CE) institutions, 4 non-UK HEIs and 4 non-student volunteers (Figure 3). Of the students interviewed, 202 of these were entering their 2nd year of study, and 175 their 3rd year (Figure 4). These projects represent a broad spectrum of fieldwork approaches, all demonstrating different methods of training (as attested by the different tasks undertaken by students, detailed in Figure 5 below) and assessment. The running of these projects also covered a wide range of approaches, from the pure research project to the ‘summer school’ directly set up to train students in archaeological techniques.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Number of Students Interviewed</th>
<th>Number of Staff Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbey Park</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Cannings Cross</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baliscate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcombe Roman Villa</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belderrig</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Besthorpe</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billown</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishopstone</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradbourne</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairnderry</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castel Henllys</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapelhouse Woods</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester Amphitheatre</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durrington Walls</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey Hill</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarshof</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kes Tor</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowlton</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyonshall</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcham and Frilford</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midsomer Norton</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Scatness</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushen Abbey</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silchester</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Quantocks</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John's Kirk</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidgrove Warren</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Wharfdale</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale of Pickering</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Halton</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicken</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wittenham Clumps</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>434</strong></td>
<td><strong>103</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: All projects visited over the duration of the project, with numbers of staff and students
### Higher Education Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of Students Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University College London</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University College Worcester</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Bournemouth</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Bradford</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Bristol</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Cardiff</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Chester</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Durham</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Edinburgh</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Exeter</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Glasgow</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Leicester</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Liverpool</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Manchester</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Newcastle upon Tyne</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nottingham</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Oxford</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Reading</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Sheffield</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Southampton</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Wales, Bangor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Wales, Lampeter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Wales, Newport</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Winchester</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of York</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### FE and CE Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of Students Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglia Ruskin University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bexhill College, Sussex</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgewater College, Somerset</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorseinon College, Swansea</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln Minster College, Lincoln</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth College, Plymouth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Leeds (Continuing Education)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Surrey (Continuing Education)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welling College, Kent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Non-UK Higher Education Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of Students Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Oklahoma, USA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Rio Grande, Brazil</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Toledo, USA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale University, USA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of people Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-student volunteers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grand Total** 434

Figure 3: The institutions attended by all of the students interviewed and the number of students from each
Figure 4: The academic years students were going into when interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What tasks have you undertaken so far?</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Augering</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backfilling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brushing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building survey</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning features</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context sheets</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field walking</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finds analysis</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint knapping</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floatation</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geophysics</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving site tours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What tasks have you undertaken so far?</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape survey</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing equipment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattocking</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific environmental work</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific recording/drawing</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing educational material for the public</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstruction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At each site we aimed to interview at least one third of all students present and as many staff as possible. However in general we adopted a flexible attitude toward questioning staff and students; sometimes questioning participants as they dug, sometimes questioning them during break times and sometimes taking them aside whilst digging was going on.

Throughout this report we have evaluated the material and responses gathered to assess trends and perspectives, rather than focusing on individual institutions or projects; where sites are discussed as a whole entity, they remain anonymous. The responses of individual students and staff have also been made anonymous. Our aim here is not to ‘name and shame’ departments where students have highlighted negative experiences (as inevitably some did). The very involvement of sites and departments in this project, enabling us to interview and participate on site, demonstrates the commitment of all departments involved to providing a positive fieldwork experience for their students. It should also be noted that the negative responses we did receive (which were in a minority) provide as much valuable evidence as those cases of good practice, and have formed an essential component in informing our recommendations.

5. Results

To begin with, we present basic demographic data associated with the survey, where we questioned students on their age, gender and family background. We then provide information as to why students chose archaeology, and the findings of our survey relating to student career aspirations, the issue of students as consumers, their views on the amount and value of fieldwork in their degree programmes, the relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What tasks have you undertaken so far?</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section drawing</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sieving</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site set up</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoilheap management</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervising</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking levels</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test pits</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trowelling and excavation</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using TST/EDM</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Tasks undertaken by students surveyed by the project

The questionnaires covered a variety of topics from basic demographic questions to more in-depth interrogations of what was expected from fieldwork. Questions addressed whether fieldwork should be compulsory, the assessment of fieldwork, the length and amount of fieldwork, the role of fieldwork with relation to archaeological and non-archaeological careers, issues of responsibility, the role of professional units, feedback, likes and dislikes of the fieldwork experience, integration of fieldwork into the rest of the course, the implications of fees, and student opinions of their contribution to the bigger picture. The questionnaires used are included in Appendix 1.

The process through which students and staff were selected for interview was largely random.
between fieldwork and the rest of their courses, and where fieldwork responsibilities lie.

5.1. Demographics

5.1.1. The student population: diversity, inclusivity and equality

The responses to questions on age, gender and family background have been particularly interesting in the light of the current legislation and guidelines relating to equality and diversity, including Aim Higher initiatives (Aim Higher 2007), the Special Education Needs and Disability Act (2001), and the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000). With Government aims to ensure 50% of school leavers are educated to degree level (Aim Higher 2007), as well as increasing pressure on departments over recruitment and retention of students, it is unsurprising that greater emphasis is being placed on recruiting from a diverse range of backgrounds (see Croucher and Romer 2007; English Heritage 2000). Our survey indicated greater involvement from varying socio-economic groups; a difficult area to gain insights into, achieved broadly here through asking whether students were among the first generation in their family to attend university (whilst not giving a definite interpretation of family background, it nonetheless provided a useful guideline). Over a third of students questioned (38%) answered that they were the first generation of their family to undertake an undergraduate degree, suggesting Government schemes to increase university attendance are having some success. Some students (e.g. KC512, HL001)\(^1\) cited participation in master classes and taster days (components of Widening Participation schemes) as contributing in their choice to study archaeology. This is clearly encouraging and indicates the value of Widening Participation schemes and initiatives in bringing people into higher education.

Whilst there is some diversity emerging in terms of socio-economic factors, there was still a noticeable lack of ethnic diversity, as well as very little indication of those with disabilities. Recent research by Richard Benjamin (2006) has examined the under-representation of black and minority groups in archaeology. Benjamin has concluded that such groups often do not recognise a direct connection with the past, recommending that more active measures be taken to engage with communities at all levels (including adults). Additionally, concepts of employment prospects are also relevant. As Aliah Ullah argued in a student case study (in Croucher and Romer 2007), minority groups usually do not perceive of archaeology as relevant, and do not consider it a viable career option; consequently the prospects from studying the subject are perceived as intangible. Recommendations in the discipline suggest greater community involvement, as well as careful considerations by departments in making their degree programmes more inclusive (Ibid; Hull 2006; Romer 2005, 2006).

The situation was much more positive with relation to gendered inclusion, with 55% of our students surveyed being female. In 1992 an IFA survey confirmed a longstanding tradition of gender imbalance in the profession, demonstrating that only 32% of the archaeological workforce were

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1 These references are the unique identifier assigned to each student to enable a discussion and the dissemination of student results whilst maintaining confidentiality. Initials represent the name of the interviewer. Interviews conducted in 2004 were numbered from 001 and interviews conducted in 2005 were numbered from 500.
INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF FIELDWORK IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ARCHAEOLOGY

current role (Morris 1992). The more recent survey shows that there has been a change in the commercial sector, with women now constituting 46% of the archaeological workforce (Aitchison & Edwards 2008, 47). This is also a trend we observed; of the undergraduates we surveyed, there were more female (55%) than male (45%) students undertaking archaeology degrees. This was similarly reflected in those wanting to pursue a career in archaeology, with 55% of those replying that they wished to pursue a career in archaeology being female. This reflects more general trends, with figures from HESA (the Higher Education Statistics Agency, [http://www.hesa.ac.uk/](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/)) illustrating that in the 2005/2006 academic year 57.3% of all students studying archaeology were female.

Whilst gender balance in academic degree programmes is now clearly a less pressing issue than in the early 1990s, observations on the gendered division of archaeological career aspirations made in the late 1980s and early 1990s remains the same. For example, when we asked students if they wanted to follow a career in archaeology and what sector they wanted to go into there were some results that illustrated weighted choices in gender and career aspirations (Figure 6). Perhaps the most striking is that nearly three times as many female (30) than male students (9) would like to go into heritage or the museum sector. Despite comparable numbers of male and female students wanting to pursue a career in field archaeology (with just 2% difference between male and female responses), there were clear discrepancies in the routes they wished to follow; twice as many females than males were interested in undertaking finds analysis, post excavation, forensic or osteoarchaeology work. This contrasted with twice as many male than female students wanting a career in survey or standing building survey work. For archaeological illustration, no female students at all were interested in pursuing a career.

In other areas the results leaned the other way, with more female students than male wanting to specialise in academia, for example. This in itself is a sign of change, as until recently, most archaeology departments were predominantly staffed with male lecturers. Additionally, it is interesting to note that environmental archaeology, an area that Gero and Gilchrist both classed as ‘archaeological housekeeping’ (Gero 1985; Gilchrist 1991), is something which equal numbers of male and female students in our study wanted to follow as a career path. This may be due to the fact that a greater number of students are able to experience environmental archaeology during their fieldwork whilst at university. An equal balance of numbers is also true for maritime archaeology, a career choice which until recently has been dominated by masculist practices (Ransley 2005). Furthermore, archaeological computing, a traditionally male occupation, was identified by one female student, and no male students, as a career path they aspired to.

So in general, whilst there are clearly some positive changes in gendered attitudes towards archaeology in the UK, it is apparent from our study that a number of female students are still veering towards ‘archaeological housekeeping’ and that more male students still want to go into field archaeology. Yet over half (58%) of all students questioned said that archaeological fieldwork played a positive role in influencing their career choices. Consequently, we suggest that fieldwork has a crucial role to play in challenging attitudes and providing students with a varied experience of different archaeological career options, which will ultimately enable equal opportunities for those wishing to pursue all archaeological career paths.
Gender equality has been a common concern within archaeology for several decades now, however recent research has begun to examine the possibilities for broadening inclusion in archaeological field practice in other areas. Studies have been undertaken with relation to disability in field practice, for example, by the Inclusive, Accessible, Archaeology project (University of Reading). Through this project, the issue of making fieldwork more accessible has been addressed (Philips et al. 2007). Significantly, the project highlighted the principle that all students (and indeed staff and professional excavators) differ in their abilities and capabilities. By making fieldwork more inclusive, and through enabling students to be more aware of their own abilities and requirements (through the project’s self-evaluation tool kit), fieldwork is made more accessible to all, not just those with disabilities. Whilst we did not directly gather data on disabilities through this project, we did ask site directors about provision for students and visitors with disabilities. Responses to this question were found to be extremely varied. A minority of sites were equipped for wheelchair users, or those with visual impairments. Many directors recognised that students had unseen disabilities which could affect their work, something they were keen to support wherever possible (and providing students made them aware of their situations). There were, however, underlying apprehensions and recognition of the challenges faced for archaeological sites, often situated in remote locations, and effected by ever-changing conditions on site. This situation is addressed by the Inclusive, Accessible, Archaeology project (Ibid), recognising that whilst every disability cannot be anticipated, and indeed facilitating one student with a disability may hinder another, through self-awareness, and students communicating their
needs to their site supervisors and directors, a more accessible approach can be encouraged.

With regards to age, 84% of students questioned were 24 or under (see Figure 7), with the remaining 16% ranging in age from 25 to 70. The majority of students questioned were undergraduates (over 90%), and of these most were going in to their second year of study (41.7%). Some graduate and postgraduate students were interviewed (6.2%), and a further 2% of those questioned were undertaking A-levels or other FE courses in archaeology.

Demographically, our study suggests that the make up of archaeology students is changing, with the discipline moving towards a more inclusive position, attracting higher numbers of women and first generation university students. Whilst there are positive changes in the demographics of today’s archaeology students, it is clear that there is still much work to be done in terms of encouraging diversity and opening the subject to all. The ramifications of the current lack of diversity impact upon the entirety of the discipline, influencing our engagement with the public, our own interpretations, and levels of reflexivity (Croucher and Romer 2007; Insoll 2007). Clearly how we approach fieldwork plays a key role in how we tackle these issues.

5.1.2. Why archaeology?

We were interested in why students had chosen to study archaeology. This issue has a clear impact on research into recruitment, an area currently being further investigated by the History, Classics and Archaeology Subject Centre (Jackson in prep.). When the

Figure 7: Age distribution of students surveyed
reasons for choosing archaeology in the fieldwork project questionnaires were analysed, some clear motivations appear to dominate responses (Figure 8). The majority chose archaeology as a result of personal interest in the subject (38%), or a general interest in history (26%). Of these, 6% cited explicitly the role of the media in attracting them to archaeology. Here, for example, student SC07 stated that he “saw archaeology on TV and it looked fun”, and student AB544 noted that he had chosen archaeology because he watched “too much Time Team, and had always been interested”. Additionally, for students such as KC568, the romance of archaeology as it was presented in Indiana Jones had played a key role in their choice of subject (see Holtorf 2007 for a discussion of archaeology in popular culture).

The majority of students (64%) appear to be drawn to archaeology through an existing interest in the subject. It is also significant that archaeology is receiving a substantial intake from people interested in history; many responded that they had always been interested in history, but wanted something more hands-on and practical, thus choosing archaeology. For those who didn’t want a career in archaeology reasons such as ‘ease of entry into course’ were a factor.

The opportunity to undertake fieldwork was cited as being a contributory factor in subject choice by 4% of students. The lack of ‘A’ level influence is also of concern; only 4% of those interviewed had taken archaeology at ‘A’ level, indicating the particular challenges the discipline faces with a lack of students exposed to archaeology through their education prior to their degree (Henson 2008). One striking figure here is that just 4% originally chose archaeology as a gateway to an archaeological career.
We also wished to gauge the family reaction to students choosing an archaeology degree. When we examined the relationship between family background and the reasons and motivations that students chose to study archaeology, there appeared to be a relatively equal balance between those who were the first generation of their families to attend university, and those who were not (Figure 9). There was a slight difference in that students who were from backgrounds where other family members had attended university previously, tended to cite reasons such as the breadth of the subject, and simply wanting something different, as a motive to choosing an archaeology degree. This contrasts with students who were the first generation of their families to attend university being motivated in their degree choice by an interest in the subject or in history. Similarly there was very little discrepancy shown between whether students were first generational university attendees in how their parents responded to their choice to study archaeology.

When overall parental responses to the choice of archaeology as a degree topic were analysed, 71% were positive about the choices made. Often students were very general about this, regularly noting only that parents were happy with their choice because they “thought it [archaeology] was cool” (Student KC570). However, where students expanded on why parents were happy with the choice, students often cited this was because “it’s a bit different and/or they’re interested in heritage” (Student KC590). Indeed, parental interest in archaeology was often noted as a key factor behind positive parental responses to the choice of the student to study archaeology. In contrast however, 13% of students said that their parents gave explicitly negative responses (Figure 10). Such responses

![Figure 9: Family background and student choices](image-url)
were often underlain by concerns regarding career prospects. Here the response given by Student KC571 was typical, stating that his “mum [was] annoyed about career prospects and money”. Another typical response was that given by Student KC592, who noted that her parents “don’t think it’s a proper degree”.

Within the analysis of family opinion, one category was designated as a ‘mixed response’, due to the fact that a number of students noted that their parents were initially apprehensive about them taking archaeology as a degree, but as their degree had progressed the parents had changed their views. From those students who chose to expand upon this, it seems that parents who changed their responses largely did so because they saw that the student was happy with their degree course, or because they became more familiar themselves with the subject. For example, student KC539 noted that “at first they [parents] were reluctant, but now they are proud and interested”. Also classed in the ‘mixed response’ category was a common reaction that in general parents were happy, but worried about the future career prospects that an archaeology degree would offer. For example student KC620 said “my parents are happy with my degree choice, but not with my career options – they want me to teach rather than get dirty”. Similarly student KC601 noted their parents “don’t care as long as I enjoy it, but they are worried about money in the long term”.

Career prospects are clearly a concern for some students of archaeology, and their parents, perhaps accentuated by the introduction of student fees. We will examine the relationship between the archaeology degree and job prospects in greater depth in the next chapter of this report.

5.2. Careers

As we will discuss in more detail below, the role of fieldwork in the undergraduate degree need not be conceived in simplistic terms as a conflict between the provision of an academic education based around critical thinking, and the provision of vocational training. Our survey suggests that the often perceived dichotomy between education and training is not one necessarily felt by students.
This section considers career aspirations, the role that fieldwork plays in these decisions, non-archaeological careers, and the role of fieldwork in developing transferable skills. We also address perceptions of universities’ roles in offering vocational training, as well as in encouraging the development of transferable skills within the degree structure.

5.2.1. General career-related findings

Although at present there are no precise figures available, current estimates are that only 15% of archaeology graduates tend to follow a career in archaeology (Collis 2001). However, as Figure 11 demonstrates, of the 434 students interviewed in the survey, 57% stated that they intended to continue with a career in the subject, with a further 25% who were undecided. Significantly, only 18% of students offered a definitive ‘no’ to following a career in the subject.

Of those who intended to, or thought they might follow a career in archaeology, just over a quarter (27%) were unsure as to what area of the discipline they wanted to follow, however just over a fifth of all of those wanting a to work in archaeology wished to follow a career in fieldwork (22.8%), and a similar number (20.8%) wanted to follow an academic route. The remaining 30% of students expressed interests in careers in the museum/heritage sector, and additionally a pursuit of specialisms, with finds-based options being particularly popular (see Figure 12).

Figure 11: Student intentions to follow a career in archaeology
As we explored student career aspirations it became clear that the results revealed a direct relationship between desired job paths and the fieldwork experience. Of the students surveyed, over half felt that fieldwork had had a positive influence upon their career aspirations, as Figure 13 illustrates. In most cases those who felt that fieldwork had a positive influence upon their career aspirations were also those who answered that they definitely wanted to follow a career in archaeology, demonstrating the importance of the practical aspects of a degree in encouraging students into the archaeology and heritage job sector.

Figure 12: The archaeology sector that students want to work in

![Pie chart showing the percentage of students interested in various sectors of archaeology](image)

Figure 13: How has your career decision been influenced by fieldwork

![Pie chart showing the influence of fieldwork on career decisions](image)
5.2.2. Vocational training

The results above in Section 5.2.1 highlight the dilemma faced by universities in terms of their role in developing employability into their degree. Whilst only a small percentage pursue archaeological careers, the archaeological sector is still likely to be the largest single area of job procurement. This situation raises questions regarding the responsibilities of universities, and the archaeological profession, in terms of training. To examine this we asked staff and students whether a degree should prepare students for a career in professional archaeology. As Figure 14 demonstrates, an overwhelming 84% of students felt that it was the responsibility of the university to prepare them for an archaeological career. Here students regularly stated that “you are doing an archaeology degree so [it] should prepare you for a career in it” (AB501), and that “if I wanted a less vocational course I would have done something else” (JW511). Yet this contrasts significantly with staff opinions (Figure 15). Only 36% of staff felt that a degree in archaeology actually does prepare a student for an archaeological career, and 19% suggested that a degree only sometimes (depending on the student and/or institution) prepares the student for a career in archaeology. For those 18% who suggested an archaeology degree provided students only with ‘the basics’, many suggested that this was because vocational training was an ongoing process. Here, staff such as AB198L, argued that in undergraduate training “we go some way - producing apprentices, not excavating archaeologists”. Although for the 26% who felt that archaeology did not prepare students for a career in archaeology, many argued that “it shouldn’t”. Staff members cited reasons such as “few other degrees produce practicing professionals; a degree is a foundation for the career. MA courses could prepare better” (KC019V). What seems most critical here is the clear disparity that exists in staff and student expectations as to the role of fieldwork within the undergraduate degree. Moreover, it is clear that there is little unity amongst staff in general as to the role the undergraduate degree should play in preparing students for a career in archaeology, an area of increasing concern given the changing culture of students as consumers, as will be discussed in section 5.6.

![Figure 14: Student Question: Should universities prepare students for a career in archaeology?](image-url)
We wished to explore the different aspects of responsibility within the archaeology degree and the above has implications as to the universities’ training role in light of student expectations. Further emphasising these points are the results received when we asked about the level of fieldwork proficiency students should obtain upon graduating. Whilst many students recognised they would not be undertaking a career in archaeology, 83% still felt that having an archaeology degree should mean that students leave university being proficient in archaeological practices. This was also reflected in staff attitudes, with 84% believing students should be proficient at fieldwork when finishing their degree (Figure 16).
Overwhelmingly, both staff and students (regardless of whether or not students wanted a career in archaeology) felt that archaeology graduates should be proficient in fieldwork when leaving university. This stands in stark contrast to the previous statistic that showed 36% of staff thought that a degree did not prepare students for a career in archaeology. A much higher percentage expected the students to be proficient in practical tasks, suggesting a disparity between the provision of archaeological training at university and the expectations of the archaeological employer. It is apparent that staff and students alike are confident of the importance of undertaking practical training to a reasonable level (the definition of this level varies between students, universities and employers); the reasons for this will be further discussed throughout the report.

5.2.3. Transferable skills

As we have already discussed above in Section 5.2.1, our survey found that 57% of student respondents were considering archaeology as a career, and 25% were unsure and not ruling archaeology out. Significantly, 58% said that fieldwork had influenced this decision, demonstrating the impact of fieldwork on future career choices. As current estimates suggest that only 15% of archaeology graduates follow a career in archaeology (Collis 2001), this raises the question of whether students simply change their minds, are unrealistically motivated by actually being on site, or whether the actualities of pay and an uncertain career market hinder those eventually pursuing a career in archaeology. Whatever the case, it is clear that despite aspirations to do so, a great percentage of students do not continue into professional archaeology. Consequently, in this study we hoped to examine more than just student career aspirations, but also tackle the key question of the role fieldwork plays in equipping students with the generic and transferable skills that will be important no matter which career they choose.

In an increasingly competitive graduate employment market, an awareness of the transferable skills that an undergraduate degree provides significantly enhances students’ employment chances. An archaeology undergraduate degree, and the practical component of this in particular, can provide a wide range of transferable skills that can be applied within other career paths (Aitchison and Giles 2006). Our study sought to examine whether students were aware of this, and how they felt their degree may enhance their employability.

We explicitly asked what transferable skills were being acquired during fieldwork. When student and staff responses are compared on this question the results mirror one another, with both staff and students citing teamwork most frequently. Following this, most students saw that they were gaining archaeological skills and general communication and social skills. Although less frequently cited, between 8% and 5% of student responses also noted aspects such as analysis, observation, initiative, organisation and responsibility, among others, as key transferable skills that fieldwork provided them with (see figure 17). More significant are the skills that few students mentioned. Less than 2% felt that fieldwork provided life skills, written, research, and numeracy skills, for instance. Also of concern are the gaining of abilities such as critical thinking, independent thought, and problem solving, with many students not realising, or at least not articulating, the role that fieldwork may play in developing these. Even more concerning was the small percentage of respondents that said they did not know what transferable skills fieldwork provided them with.
or that it did not provide any transferable skills at all. Student AB141 for example, said “you don’t pick up many transferable skills in fieldwork – unless you want to be a navvy”. Suggestions as to how to overcome this situation are given in recommendations at the end of this report, including the roles of assessment, reflexivity, and communication in enhancing undergraduate understandings of the varied skills that fieldwork can provide.

We additionally mapped student and staff responses to generic skills cited as important in the QAA benchmark statement (in italics Figure 17). Whilst some skills clearly match our student and staff responses, others relate more ambiguously (such as communication skills). Whilst some of the skills stated in the benchmark statement were not covered in the responses, these tended to relate to argument development and research planning, which are areas that are better developed through other aspects of the degree, rather than explicitly through fieldwork, or which are additionally gained reflectively, once back in the classroom after working in the field. Interestingly, many responses covered additional practical and peripheral skills than those included in the benchmark statement, including time keeping, social skills and life skills, demonstrating that fieldwork often plays a broader role in the personal and social development of many students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What transferable skills does fieldwork provide? (Student/Staff responses given with relevant QAA benchmark statement listed in italics below)</th>
<th>Staff responses</th>
<th>Student responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teamwork</strong></td>
<td>24.40%</td>
<td>25.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate effectively in a team via experience of working in a group, for example through fieldwork, laboratory and/or project work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social/communication skills</strong></td>
<td>17.60%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present effective oral presentations for different kinds of audiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(as fieldwork often involves working in new environments with minimal support) appreciate and be sensitive to different cultures, and deal with unfamiliar situations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employability in archaeology/fundamental archaeological skills</strong></td>
<td>7.40%</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation/analysis/recording skills</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practise core fieldwork techniques of identification, surveying, recording, excavation, and sampling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practise core laboratory techniques of recording, measurement, analysis, and interpretation of archaeological material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe and describe different classes of primary archaeological data, and objectively record their characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independence/confidence building/initiative</strong></td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>4.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical/hard work/hands-on skills</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation/multi-tasking</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility/leadership/management skills</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work under pressure/persevere in hard conditions/commitment/determination</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to take orders/work in a disciplined environment</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What transferable skills does fieldwork provide? (Student/Staff responses given with relevant QAA benchmark statement listed in italics below)</td>
<td>Staff responses</td>
<td>Student responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>draw down and apply appropriate scholarly, theoretical, and scientific principles and concepts to archaeological problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy skills</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>select and apply appropriate statistical and numerical techniques to process archaeological data, recognising the potential and limitations of such techniques</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience/accuracy</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General (not listed) transferable skills</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written skills</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prepare effective written communications for different readerships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appreciate the importance of safety procedures and responsibilities (both personal and with regard to others) in the field and the laboratory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills relating to other professions</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills/personal development</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No skills</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing skills</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make effective and appropriate use of C&amp;IT (such as: word processing packages, databases, and spreadsheets)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider understanding of subject</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveying skills</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practise core fieldwork techniques of identification, surveying, recording, excavation, and sampling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assemble coherent research/project designs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only transferable skills relevant to (specific area of) archaeology</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make effective and appropriate forms of visual presentation (graphics, photographs, spreadsheets)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assemble coherent research/project designs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation skills</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discover and recognise the archaeological significance of material remains and landscapes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interpret spatial data, integrating theoretical models, traces surviving in present-day landscapes, and excavation data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17: What transferable skills does fieldwork provide? Questionnaire responses shown as percentages of all staff and student responses respectively
5.3. The student experience and fieldwork

The above sections have dealt with career choices and aspirations, and these topics will be explored further below with reference to the student experience. However, we also wanted to investigate the role that fieldwork played in the student experience whilst at university, and student expectations of fieldwork within their broader degrees. This section addresses what students feel they gain from fieldwork, whether they would like a greater or lesser amount of fieldwork during their degree, whether this should be compulsory, issues over the flexibility of their courses, and finally, the implications of fees and consequences of the ‘student as consumer’.

When asked how fieldwork contributed to their student experience (Figure 18), social skills predominated answers (34%). This is potentially a great selling point for students in terms of recruitment (see also Holtorf 2006 for a discussion on the importance of the social role of excavation). The second most common answer related to the rest of the course, stating that fieldwork gave them a greater understanding of the subject (19%). The benefit of a different learning environment was important for many students (12%). The motivational aspect cited is also significant. Indeed, it was not uncommon for students to describe during interviews how they had felt de-motivated and had even been re-considering their degree subject options before taking part in fieldwork. They stated that fieldwork had invigorated and inspired them, with further support arising from the social bonds created during fieldwork; these bonds were mentioned by many of those entering their 3rd year as instrumental in their achievements, and stamina, so far.

When staff were asked the same question about how fieldwork contributed to the student experience, the majority (34%) recognised...
personal and social development, including confidence building, responsibility, social skills and communication (Figure 19). These factors are elements that few other degree choices can boast and should be highlighted to potential graduates.

In order to get a feeling for how students felt their fieldwork fitted into the grander scheme, we asked them about their contribution to the bigger picture; we wanted to see if students made a link between the tasks they were carrying out in the lab or site and how these linked into history and archaeology in general. As Figure 20 illustrates, 28% felt that they were helping to move archaeological understanding forward, 12.6% saw that they were contributing as a member of a larger team and 7.8% thought that they were raising local and public awareness.

In contrast, some students responded negatively to this question, with 6.4% noting that they were little more than manual labour, and referring to their contribution as “cheap labour” (e.g. AB135S and AB037S), “slave labour” (e.g. HC003S and KC581), and in one case as nothing more than a “dirt monkey” (KC031S). Indeed 3.7% students went further than this, feeling that they contributed nothing at all. Here students, such as KC036S for example, expressed that they simply felt that they were “not important in the general scheme of things”. At the heart of these complaints seems to be an alienation from the interpretive process, or a lack of recognition and responsibility for their role, such as student AB137S who commented that they were contributing “nothing at all - my name would never even turn up on site reports”.

Certain precautions can be taken to prevent such feelings, including issues over responsibility over what is being excavated, the support of supervisors, and the role of communication. On sites where students were removed from the archaeology as soon as anything perceived as important was uncovered, negative responses occurred; whilst there is an obvious duty to the archaeology, expert attention can be provided
to support and teach the inexperienced excavator, to help include the student and provide training on the correct procedures in excavating challenging areas. Additionally, a lack of support from supervisors often resulted in students feeling confused and incompetent, unsure if they were doing the right thing. A correct balance between giving students responsibility over what they are digging, and providing enough information, training and support needs to be sought. Whilst there are challenges inherent in this, especially with larger excavations, these factors are fundamental both to a positive student learning experience, and indeed to the responsible treatment of archaeological remains; whilst this may seem obvious, the negative answers we received in relation to these points demonstrate that good practice was not always taking place. Also closely connected to positive student experiences were the relationships between fieldwork and the rest of the course, as will be discussed next.

5.4. Fieldwork and the rest of the course

Whilst for many institutions the fieldwork component of a degree often stands alone, separate from the rest of the degree programme, this is not the universal situation. We analysed student responses to how fieldwork contributes to the rest of the course, as well as asking what students perceived they were contributing to the bigger picture. There were clear traits that emerged in relation to assessment, feedback, and ties between fieldwork and other modules.

When asked how fieldwork relates to the rest of the university course, we can see that on the whole students are aware of the relevance of their fieldwork to the rest of their degree (Figure 21). Here over half (52.5%) of the responses students gave indicated that fieldwork clearly contributed to their course, either by putting theory into practice, helping
their understanding or generally clarifying taught aspects. Additionally, 9.6% of students acknowledged the extent to which fieldwork helps contextualise and understand written sources (especially site reports), and 7.2% identified the extent to which fieldwork acted as a motivating factor in their degree performance and developed their career aspirations.

There were also some negative responses to this question, although these were in a minority; 4.5% of students did not believe that fieldwork contributed to the rest of the course, with 1.9% explicitly stating that fieldwork does not contribute to theory, and 1.3% stating that fieldwork would be relevant if they studied the particular area relating to the excavation. Moreover, 0.4% of responses stated that they simply didn’t know how fieldwork contributed towards the rest of their course (Figure 21). For many who provided negative responses, the critical factor was often the perception that what they were doing did not relate to the rest of their degree. Student AB140S for example, stated that fieldwork was “useful only if you want to be a practical archaeologist”. Additionally for many students who responded negatively, a key point was the feeling that there was no value in understanding the archaeological process, and how this contributed to the construction of archaeological knowledge. Student KC618 stated that fieldwork “doesn’t relate as we mostly do theory at university”.

In contrast, the more positive experiences arose when students understood the value of their fieldwork to the rest of the course, including direct links between fieldwork and other modules, coursework relating to their fieldwork, and the role of assessment. A particularly good example here is student HC021S, who was one of many to respond that fieldwork “gives you a clearer idea of the process of interpretation, decision making and the interpretive process”. Given the significance that fieldwork plays within
the degree, it is unfortunate that a number of students were unable to make the connection between this and the broader programme, and that the value of their actions in the field were not clear to them.

One factor that contributed to a greater linking between fieldwork and the academic programme was assessment and the integration of practical course aspects within the degree. On the sites visited, a greater understanding of the fieldwork was evidenced when the students had been given some preparatory work during term time that tied directly in with their fieldwork component. Making their fieldwork contribution matter to their degree (including assessment) gave the students greater appreciation of what they were achieving on site.

We asked both students and staff about the role of assessment. Just under half of the sites visited did offer some form of assessment (Figure 22). The 43% of students who were not being assessed also includes the second and third year undergraduates who had already been assessed, but had come on other projects to gain more experience. What is alarming about Figure 22 is the 6% of students who did not know if they were being assessed, showing that there may be some communication issues within some universities.

We also asked students whether they felt their fieldwork SHOULD be assessed. Overwhelmingly, 73% answered that it should be (Figure 23), with comments made including: “fieldwork should be assessed so you can see how much you have learnt” (student AB041) and “assessment is a reward for all of your effort” (student AB122). It was felt that progression could be both demonstrated and realised through assessment, as well as identifying areas for improvement.

![Figure 22: Student Question: Is your fieldwork assessed?](image)

![Figure 23: Student Question: Should fieldwork be assessed?](image)
The assessment of fieldwork can be especially beneficial for those who learn in different ways – many students are experiential learners who learn through doing, rather than listening or watching. Through integrating practical training into the degree as something that can be graded, the students were given an opportunity to prove themselves in a forum other than a classroom (see Thorpe 2004 for a discussion of methods used to grade practical work). From our interviews we heard comments from students who were not necessarily good at essay writing or more traditional academic pursuits, but proved themselves to be excellent students when given a practical task. By assessing or grading practical performance it gives the students another chance to excel, using a set of skills that may not be developed through classroom learning.

Fieldwork not only has huge benefits pedagogically, but additionally can be crucial in motivating students. It was observed that the sites that did not have a policy of assessment often found it difficult to motivate students. If the practical work was taking place during vacation time and was compulsory, but had no bearing on the outcome of their course, then students seemed to lose interest very quickly. Incidences of resentment and anger at being ‘made’ to undertake practical work were not uncommon.

The role of assessment is especially significant when reviewed with the negative answers given to ‘how does fieldwork relate to the rest of your course?’, and ‘what are you contributing to the bigger picture?’. At one university, 86% of students believed that their fieldwork was assessed, and this institution had just 7% of students giving a negative answer. Similarly, at two other institutions, 90% and 67% respectively thought their fieldwork as assessed, and all students provided positive responses to their understanding of their contribution to the bigger picture. In contrast, at an institution where 87% of students knew fieldwork was not assessed, these gave the highest number of negative responses, with 30% of students not seeing how they were contributing to the bigger picture.

However, the relationship is not clear-cut and clearly experiences are not solely dependant on assessment. At one institution, for example, only 54% of students thought that their fieldwork was assessed, yet only 8% provided negative answers, and this was also noted elsewhere, such as an institution where 60% of students believed their fieldwork to be assessed and just 4% responded negatively.

Whilst there are clearly other factors involved and it is not possible to prove a direct link between assessment and positive outcomes, it does nonetheless appear that assessment is at the very least a significant contributory factor to positive experiences, influencing a student’s understanding and perceptions of the importance and relevance of their fieldwork.

We also asked students if there was anything they gained from fieldwork that they did not gain from the rest of their course (Figure 24). Unsurprisingly 44% cited gaining first-hand experience, followed by 10% who cited the social side of fieldwork, with the third highest answer, 9%, reflecting again the use in elucidating theory and putting theory into practice.

Throughout our report we note there are a range of obvious benefits in providing fieldwork that are difficult to gain through other areas of the course. It provides real, hands-on experiences, making learning more tangible, an area especially valuable for visual and experiential learners; such experience is an essential component in the learning cycle of many students (Boud et al 1985; Honey and Mumford 1982; Kolb 1984). As well as
the social, personal and communicative skills, it also demonstrates the link between theory and practice, helping students to understand field reports, and crucially, promotes understanding of the methods and processes behind the creation of archaeological knowledge. This enables students to develop critical thinking, analytical and interpretative skills and abilities, as well as providing an important arena for students to develop their understanding of archaeological career paths.

When asked how much practical experience they thought an archaeology student should have before graduating, the students’ expectations were surprisingly high – with some students expecting to undertake over a year’s worth of practical training before they graduate (Figure 25). Indeed, some universities do offer practical placement years that would increase a students vocational experience substantially; even considering this, the level of vocational training that the students thought was suitable was high – averaging 3-4 weeks every summer.

When we compare this to the actual amount of fieldwork students had to undertake to graduate from the institutions surveyed (Figure 26), we see that the students’ expectations may not be met with regards to practical training. As can be seen, the majority of universities offer substantially less practical training than the students expect.

5.5. Fieldwork requirements

Having considered the importance of fieldwork in contributing to the student experience, we then wanted to examine how much fieldwork staff and students felt should be provided, and whether they would like to see more fieldwork at their institutions.

Figure 24: Student Question: Is there anything that fieldwork can give you that is not provided by the rest of your course?
Figure 25: How much fieldwork experience should a student have before graduating?

Figure 26: How much fieldwork does a student have to undertake to graduate from your institution?
Nonetheless it is clear that staff and students opinions converge when asked whether they would like to see more fieldwork at their institution. Here an overwhelming 75% of students and 68% of staff said that they would like more fieldwork (Figure 27). However, nearly a third of staff felt that fieldwork provision was fine as it was, compared to only 17% of students.

5.5.1. Compulsory fieldwork?

We can see from Figure 28 that 91% of students felt that fieldwork should be compulsory. Interestingly none of those who answered no to ‘should fieldwork be compulsory?’ gave a negative response to ‘how does fieldwork relate to the rest of your course?’; it is significant that those who don’t want fieldwork to be compulsory can still see its value in the classroom. Overwhelmingly, students could see that fieldwork helped elucidate what they had previously learnt in the classroom, with 51% of students believing that undertaking fieldwork helps put theory into practice, and clarifies the taught aspects of the course, as well contributing to the understanding of site reports, and the archaeological process in general. Prior to undertaking fieldwork many students stated that they had regarded excavation...
data as pure fact. Once participating in the field the subjective nature of excavation, interpretation and reporting become apparent; this is a fundamental situation for undergraduates of archaeology to fully understand. Whilst these factors can be taught in the classroom, it is only through first hand experience that they become ‘real’. Extremely positive answers were also given when there were close links and ties between fieldwork and the rest of the degree programme; this area will be returned to later in the report.

Although overwhelmingly most students could see the value of fieldwork, there were a number of concerns repeatedly cited by students with relation to obtaining fieldwork experience, including timing of excavations and the conflicts between having time to excavate and time to undertake paid employment. The next section addresses some of these challenges.

5.5.2. Flexibility

Given the practical factors that were repeatedly cited by the students with relation to fieldwork, we asked students whether greater flexibility would be desired on their degree courses with relation to fieldwork (Figure 29).

Only 16% of students said that they were already happy with the flexibility on their course. Significantly, 19% commented that they did not want flexibility in their degree. Popular replies explaining why flexibility was not desired included:

- if flexibility is desired students can chose another course
- concerns over diluting the degree
- the belief that a student should not choose archaeology if they are not interested in it

Figure 29: Should there be greater flexibility within courses? (Staff and student responses both shown as a percentage of staff and students respectively)
• it is better to have all the students doing comparable courses

In this respect it seems that many students are happy to let the university supply them with courses, with some students explicitly stating that they picked a particular university because of some of their specific degree programmes. However, 58% would like to see more flexibility.

When staff and student opinions are compared, 22% of staff, compared to 16% of students believed that courses were already flexible. Just 19% of students, compared to 29% of staff thought that there should not be more flexibility, and nearly 20% more students (58%) than staff (41%, with a further 4% agreeing but with a minimum fieldwork component) wanted greater flexibility. This may be a reflection of staff awareness of the administration and other requirements that flexibility would entail, as well as concerns over differential pedagogic gain through different pathways.

We also cross-referenced answers to whether students who wanted more flexibility also wanted fieldwork to be compulsory (Figure 30). Unsurprisingly, the small percent (6%) of those that didn’t want compulsory fieldwork favoured greater flexibility, or answered that their course was already flexible. Of those that thought courses should be more flexible, 89% still argued that fieldwork should be compulsory. All of those that were unsure if courses should be flexible still wanted compulsory fieldwork. It is significant that almost all of those wanting flexibility also think fieldwork should be compulsory.

This result is even more important when the reasons for wanting flexibility are examined (Figure 31). Overwhelmingly, the reasons for greater flexibility are to allow for more, rather than less, fieldwork or vocationally-related components. Only 14% of those that gave a reason for greater flexibility stated they felt they should be able to opt out of fieldwork,
with a further 18% thinking there should be a minimum amount of compulsory fieldwork, and 6% thinking that the fieldwork and a lack of flexibility was suitable during the 1st year. 20% of students stated that they would like a greater choice of modules on their course, with 16% asking for more fieldwork options, and 9% more specialist modules.

Obviously these statistics demonstrate that students would value having the option of being taught more vocationally-motivated subjects. This creates a certain issue for HEIs in terms of the education vs. training debate, an area that will be returned to later in the report (Section 5.7). Before moving on to address this, we would first like to turn to another key aspect that has arisen throughout our study; the relationship between the provision of fieldwork and changing student expectations as a consequence of tuition fees.

5.6. Tuition fees: students as consumers?

We compared attitudes of students, and the experiences of staff, in relation to tuition fees. Here a clear contradiction in student opinion arose. Students were asked whether the introduction of fees had impacted upon how they viewed practical experience. In many instances students indicated that the introduction of fees had much less of an impact upon how they viewed practical experience than was expected, with just over a third of students who answered the question (38%) stating that fees had an explicitly negative impact, whilst 58% of students suggested that fees had no impact upon how they viewed practical work (Figure 32). Indeed one student noted that the introduction of fees had in fact had a positive impact, stating that the introduction of fees “makes you want to do better in your degree and be more grown up about it” (Student AB506). Nonetheless, 38% is still a significant quantity
of students to be affected by tuition fees. This section of participants experienced the most problems from trying to combine working in the summer vacation to earn money and taking on practical archaeological experience.

Although the introduction of tuition fees created clear problems for many undergraduates in undertaking fieldwork, the impacts of tuition fees upon their choice of career were minimal. Whilst 38% of students had problems with the introduction of fees in relation to fieldwork, this had not had a significant impact upon their choice of archaeology as a career. Indeed nearly half of those students who wanted to follow a career in archaeology stated that this was the case even though they felt that fees had impacted negatively upon how they viewed practical experience. It appears then that the introduction of fees has not had an overly negative impact in general on students wanting to pursue a career in archaeology, even when students’ practical experience has been affected negatively by tuition fees.

It is interesting to compare staff and student opinions of fees here (Figure 33). It appears that staff had a more negative view of tuition fees than students. Whilst only 38% of students felt that fees had had a negative effect upon their degree, in comparison 45% of staff saw the impact of tuition fees as negative. However, whilst 56% of students felt that fees had no impact, only 17% of staff shared this opinion, illustrating a major discrepancy between the views that staff and students have about the introduction of fees. However, this reflects the opinions of those students that have already chosen to undertake an archaeology degree; clearly we are missing the opinions of those that have chosen not to take archaeology, to whom tuition fees may have been a contributory factor.

The majority of staff who felt that paying fees was negative, cited that this was because it had a detrimental affect upon fieldwork (31% of staff). Many of these elaborated that this was largely due to students finding fieldwork difficult because it meant losing potential earning time during the vacations, thus appearing detrimental to fieldwork more than any other aspect of the degree. As a result staff frequently noted that “students can’t afford to dig, especially when it is not assessed” (AB129L). Indeed for many this was prompting reassessments of fieldwork programmes, for example, member of staff AB109L was among several to note that “we now have to consider cutting the amount of fieldwork due to student financial constraints”. Two other most commonly cited reasons why

![Figure 32: Student Question: The impact of tuition fees](image-url)
staff saw fees as having a negative impact were that the discipline “has become more elite. Only rich students can afford to do fieldwork” (AB006V - 7% of staff shared this view) and that “students want more for their money’s worth” (HC527) making “students look at a degree as a commodity” (AB062L - 20% of staff expressed opinions to this effect). Whilst few staff felt fees had been entirely positive, some did note positive aspects, for example AB567 thought that because of fees “in general the students can be more directed, [and] will focus more on assignments, but at the exclusion of looking at the subject more widely”.

Despite less of a concern with the impact of tuition fees amongst students than staff, it is a common concern within the discipline that the introduction of tuition fees may lead to the commoditisation of the degree, with the consequence of students becoming consumers.

Such perceived commoditisation would place pressure on HEIs to provide a ‘service’, as well as raising issues relating to responsibilities and accountability. It is to these key concerns and issues that we will now turn.

5.7. Responsibilities: university, students, the profession

The proportion of 18 to 30-year-olds going into higher education has risen from an elite few of around 6% in the 1960s to 44% in 2004 [http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php?id=youngpeople]. This growing number of students now leave university with average debts of nearly £15,000 [http://education.guardian.co.uk/students/finance/story/0,184501700.html] - citing figures from August 2006) and unsurprisingly a university degree is seen as an investment in their future. With rising fees there is often a perceived responsibility
for universities to provide for students’ needs, with a growing demand for accountability. Part of what many students, and their parents, expect often involves employability. However there is evidence that employers are not happy with the quality of worker that the universities are producing;

“The culture clash between bosses and graduate recruits is threatening business, a study claims. Many graduates lack creativity and communication skills, and employers are unwilling to train them. The skills gap issue has been an exercise in finger-pointing and blame-avoidance” [www.demos.org.uk].

Given that the archaeology sector still provides a significant proportion of careers for archaeology graduates, are students being let down by the fact that the profession is unhappy with the level of many archaeology graduates? Or is this simply not the role of the university, with graduate employers in other fields frequently investing heavily in training of their new graduate employees?

According to the most recent IFA Profiling the Profession document, in 2008 there are 6865 archaeologists working in the profession, and in the year 2005-2006, 15,990 undergraduates and postgraduates were studying archaeology at UK HEIs (Aitchison and Edwards 2008, 45). Clearly there are many more graduates than there are those working in the profession. Yet we found that just over half of the students that we interviewed harbour some ambition to continue with a career in archaeology, as discussed in Section 5.2.1. So who is responsible for equipping them with the skills needed to enter the archaeological workforce – or indeed any post-university workforce? We wanted to ask staff and students on this project if they saw it as the university or the employer’s responsibility to train the archaeologists of the future?

A recent article written by the association of colleges has estimated that the total training offered by employers in this country amounts to only £205 per employee per year [http://education.guardian.co.uk/further/story/0,,1740650,00.html], and whilst there are no figures available for archaeology, anecdotal evidence suggests that the figure is far lower for archaeological employees. Certainly archaeology is seen to be a career that relies on a low paid, itinerant workforce working on short contracts (for more information on the current state of commercial archaeological employment in the UK please refer to Archaeology Labour Market Intelligence: Profiling the Profession 2002-03, Aitchison and Edwards 2003, 2008).

Consequently the university degree is being pulled in three ways – it must meet the needs of the student who is effectively paying for the service; it has to live up to the expectations of employers; and the university has to be seen to be offering a valuable ‘product’ to attract ‘customers’ in the new open market of education. Against this background our study considered the implications of this debate for the provision of archaeological fieldwork. Here we explored both staff and student attitudes towards who should be responsible for training future generations of archaeologists, and our findings are outlined in the sections below.

5.7.1. The role of the profession.

There has been a long-standing and lively discussion in archaeology surrounding the so-called ‘education vs. training’ debate (see Aitchison 2004; Aitchison and Giles 2006; Collis 2000; Hamilakis 2004; Hamilakis and Rainbird 2004, 52; Dowson et al 2004; Stone 2004, 6; Rainbird and Hamilakis 2001). This debate serves to highlight the supposed opposition between academia
and the profession. However, through this project one of the main factors coming to light has been the instances of academics and professionals working together, successfully contributing to the education of our undergraduates. This has led us to doubt the validity of this opposition, given the frequency of such successful projects and examples of excellent practice, as will be discussed below.

Integral to this debate is the role universities should play in ensuring the employability of graduates, and whether a degree should prepare students for a career in professional archaeology. This has already been discussed in Section 5.2.2, with an overwhelming 84% of students feeling that it was the responsibility of the university to prepare them for an archaeological career. Whether or not a degree actually does prepare them for professional archaeology has also been discussed in Section 5.2.2, as well as debates over whether it should. Clearly this is an ongoing debate, as discussed in references outlined previously. However, we felt that as well as addressing the role of universities, responsibilities of the profession are also of relevance, with issues raised over the role that the profession should play in the training of its future employees, an area which will be returned to in Section 5.7.2.

We also investigated views on the burden of responsibility between the university and students with regard to gaining field experience. Although students would like to see more choice in their vocational training, universities are usually operating on tight budgets; fieldwork is one area that is often trimmed to bare essentials, or even cut altogether. Although fieldwork and other practical skills feature prominently in the QAA Subject benchmark statement: Archaeology (see http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/archaeology.asp), the provision of practical training varies greatly from institution to institution. Teaching staff are increasingly coming under pressure to cut costs, and this, combined with health and safety issues,
and difficulties over finding adequate fieldwork opportunities (archaeology is a non-renewable resource after all) often make providing practical training opportunities difficult.

The primary form of vocational training that archaeology degrees offer is the fieldwork component and, as can be seen in Figure 34, the university is almost singularly responsible for placing students in training projects. Here 88% of students obtained a place on their fieldwork project in the summer of 2004 and 2005 through their university.

This result becomes particularly telling when it is compared to the student responses when asked who should organise their vocational training (Figure 35). In this case 52% thought that the responsibility should lie wholly or partially with the students, but in reality only a tiny fraction of students actually organised their own placements.

Reasons that the students gave for wanting to organise their own placements were:

- You should learn to sort it out yourself
- It will help in finding employment later on
- It is better if you choose the kind of dig you want to be on
- It allows greater flexibility as people want to do different things
- It is good to know what is going on elsewhere (rather than just at your own institution)
- It helps to develop independent research skills
- It helps to develop networks

This presents only a summary of a wide range of reasons, however it is clear that choice and career development were the two overriding reasons that students gave for wanting to pick their own vocational training.

This can be linked back to the previous suggestion of university responsibility for training. Although the students would like to organise their own training, very few of them actually do. Some of
the reasons cited by students for not organising independent training were:

- it is hard to find practical projects yourself
- if fieldwork is compulsory then the university should organise it
- it makes everything easier if the university organises it
- students have enough to worry about with exams
- the university needs to organise fieldwork in order to make sure there is a high standard of teaching
- teaching staff already have the contacts

Some of these reasons can be attributed to student inertia, but there is also a sense of worry and fear that students would not be able to source a project independently. Students would like to undertake more practical aspects, but are also looking for the support of the university. Obviously there are time and resource implications for institutions, and whilst this report does not hold all of the answers, it does communicate the expectations and desires of students, and their perceptions of their, and the universities’, responsibilities with regard to fieldwork provision.

5.7.2. Third parties

The project has so far explored the sometimes-conflicting responsibilities of the student and the university, but where does the employer fit into this relationship?

![Figure 36: Staff and Student reactions to the question “How would you feel about a third party being involved in the training process”? (Staff and student responses both shown as a percentage of staff and students respectively)](image-url)
Visiting the sites around the country we came across many fantastic examples of professional archaeologists working alongside universities. This can be seen as a two-way street for future archaeological employers and universities: employers can equip students with the necessary skills to make them attractive fieldworkers of the future and the university can benefit from extra staff with a wide range of experience and knowledge.

We investigated student and staff attitudes to the involvement of third parties (Figure 36). It can be seen that there were overwhelmingly positive attitudes to the inclusion of the profession in university training and fieldwork, with 63% of staff and 69% of students seeing this as a positive move forwards. Some of the reasons given by staff for their answers included:

**PROs**

- Gives the student useful contacts
- Shows students what career paths are available
- Demonstrates different types of archaeological practice
- Fosters links between academia and the contract sector

**CONs**

- Most field archaeologists do not appreciate the training aspect of the excavations
- Academia and contract archaeology have different expectations
- Concerns over archaeological units using students for commercial gain

Despite reservations, it was overwhelmingly felt that, providing the right safeguards were in place, and that there was close collaboration between the university and the profession ensuring high standards of training and awareness, that working together could be successfully achieved.

These responses are extremely positive for both the archaeological industry and academic archaeology alike, suggesting that professional units and universities are continuing to forge strong links through research projects and the training of archaeological students. This is reinforced when the examples we witnessed of units working alongside universities are examined. The most positive student experiences were received from the sites where both professional units and university staff were working side-by-side. Students felt that they were receiving ‘real world’ experiences, whilst at the same time having the benefit of research input from lecturing staff, and importantly, developing positive staff/student relationships through the fieldwork experience, with direct impact both in the field, and back in the classroom. Combined with this is the assurance that the fieldwork, whilst facilitated and supported by units, retained significance and relevance to the rest of the degree. This was continually cited as leading to pedagogical value and adding context to the excavation taking place.
6. Observations: implications, guidelines and good practice

In the above sections we have presented some of the key results of our study. As we outlined in section 2, our project has sought to investigate staff and student experiences and expectations of fieldwork in the undergraduate degree. Beyond this, one of the aims of this project was to draw attention to positive examples that we encountered on different projects around the country and to disseminate what was seen to be ‘good practice’ in providing fieldwork as part of the undergraduate degree. Consequently, we argue that at the heart of the good practice we encountered, and central to student expectations of fieldwork in the undergraduate degree, there are three key aspects:

- Professional and academic collaboration
- Responsibility
- Communication

In the penultimate section of this report we discuss guidelines and good practices that may assist in employing these three positive aspects in undergraduate fieldwork provision.

6.1. Professional and academic collaboration

Our results have demonstrated the value of professional and academic collaboration, providing an integrated approach to training and excavation. An additional factor that such relationships produce relates to choices offered to students in their fieldwork placements.

Choice may seem like a highly contingent category. A large, well-funded archaeology department with high number of research staff may automatically be able to provide students with a wide range of choices in the fieldwork component of their degree. However many archaeological departments around the country consist of only a few staff, and even some of the larger departments do not have the funds or resources to organise several practical projects at once. This can often lead to a lack of choice when students come to undertake practical training. One way around this is to work in unison with archaeological employers. Many of the sites we visited had excellent relationships with commercial archaeological companies, and as we have outlined above, this is a relationship that both staff and students are keen to develop.

As our study illustrates, developing links with archaeological employers not only provides valuable work experience for students, it also motivates students and provides them with a greater awareness of archaeological careers, as well as enabling units to have a hand in training future fieldworkers.

6.2. Responsibility

Another important observation we wished to explore was the fact that it was often the worst equipped sites with the poor archaeology and terrible weather that had the best working atmosphere. This was definitely one of the benefits of conducting the interviews in person – we could pick up on the more subjective nuances of a project. As a result we found that a major factor in motivating students is ownership. The best sites for morale and hard work were the projects where students were given responsibility for their own recording, their part in the interpretive process and their own working day. Students thrived on problem-solving rather than being taught by rote. A step further, seen at a minority of sites, was the inclusion of students in the final site
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report. Students knew they would be named and their participation noted, leading to satisfaction, enthusiasm, and pride.

Although such practices may be easier on smaller projects, sites with large numbers of students, covering large areas, were still able to reinforce responsibility and ownership in other ways. In particular, calling upon students to give site tours both to colleagues and the public, or even simply asking them to explain to the rest of the group an area in which they were working. These were all aspects that enabled students to feel like responsible, interpreting archaeologists. This in turn often motivated students to draw connections between their own work and its wider relationship to their degree. These may sound like common-sense practices that are perhaps nothing new, yet for some of the projects visited the omission of these small gestures toward student responsibility had an overwhelmingly negative impact on student experiences of fieldwork.

6.3. Communication

Our third observation again does not present a surprise; the results of our survey illustrate the extent to which practical experience was enhanced by good lines of communication between staff and students. Where students were questioned about their most and least favourite aspects of fieldwork, 5% cited problems with supervision as their least favourite aspect. Amongst such responses, communication between staff and students was often fundamental to problems. Student AB088S, for example, was typical in stating that the aspect they least enjoyed was "not being involved in decisions or told why things were happening". In contrast, almost 7% of students cited learning and the exchange of ideas as what they most enjoyed about fieldwork. General communication in the field, which sees staff and students discussing ideas, the rationale behind methodologies employed, interpretations and more general decisions may sound common-sense, but the explicit application of this is highly fruitful. As this report illustrates, communication can not only provide students with a greater feeling of responsibility and a clearer understanding of archaeological career paths, it can also enable students to understand the relationship between fieldwork and the rest of their course, which in turn is a key motivating factor for undergraduates generally.

Communication is not simply an issue that can be confined to the site itself. Following the communicative process through in a formal sense by asking students to provide feedback can not only empower and give responsibility

![Figure 37: What opportunities do you have to provide feedback?](image-url)
to students, but it can also assist those providing fieldwork opportunities in enhancing future provision. This may once again seem obvious, yet when questioned many students either noted that there was very little opportunity to provide or receive feedback, or they were unsure if there was any formal means to do this. 52% of sites had no mechanism for students to pass their opinions on to staff, with only 10% of sites having a formal, recognised way of offering feedback (Figure 37).

Despite this, when questioned, 65% of students stated that they wanted the opportunity to give the staff feedback (Figure 38). Some of the reasons for this included:

- Some lecturers are too focused on what they are doing
- There should be a survey to see how things have gone
- Students can make valuable suggestions
- It would make our opinions feel valued
- Would like to give positive comments to teaching staff
- We could let lecturers know how much support to give
- It would be better if there were more seminars after work to follow up the dig

Ultimately, what such responses illustrate is that whilst we have discussed professional and academic collaboration, responsibility and communication as three specific areas of good practice, these are all intricately connected. Providing students with choice and giving them responsibility within the interpretive process and fieldwork are undoubtedly good practice, but at the heart of these areas is the presence of good, field-based, formal and informal communicative practices.

Figure 38: Would you like to give feedback?
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7. Conclusions and recommendations

This project has been the most wide-ranging exploration of archaeological staff and students in the UK. We estimate that we interviewed over 10% of full-time archaeology undergraduates during the survey phase. This gives us the opportunity to investigate the current state of practical provision and analyse what this means to staff and students throughout the country. From the data collected we are able to draw the following conclusions and accompanying recommendations.

- **Students wanted more archaeological fieldwork during their degree programmes:** This was striking, even amongst those not wishing to pursue a career in archaeology. Those wanting greater flexibility on their degree courses wished this out of a desire to undertake more, and more varied, specialised training and research rather than as a means to reduce the fieldwork component of their degree. Even the majority of those wanting the option to opt out of fieldwork still believed there should be a minimum fieldwork component to their course during the first year.

- **The value that fieldwork added to the undergraduate degree experience was almost entirely positive:** The results of this study leave no room for doubt as to the unique value and importance of the role of fieldwork in the archaeological degree. This was clear in various ways;
  - Social and personal development; an area that is a huge strength of archaeology as opposed to other subjects studying the past.
  - Professional development. Our survey illustrates the extent to which fieldwork provides both vocational experience and transferable skills, as well as being fundamental in understanding production of knowledge in the discipline.
  - Understanding the nature of archaeological excavation, the role of interpretation, and the idea that not everything is always factual or clear-cut, is central to academic research in archaeology, and this is something the students stated they only fully comprehended after being in the field.

- **Fieldwork may be profitable in attracting student numbers:** Given that students are requesting fieldwork, it may be profitable for departments to explore ways to increase their fieldwork components, or at the very least, not to reduce them, in order to increase student numbers.

- **It is important that students do not feel that their fieldwork is isolated and unrelated to the rest of their degree:** Whilst increasing fieldwork components may have highly positive impacts for departments, it is essential that this is done with attention paid to the pedagogical benefits and learning outcomes gained through fieldwork, with special focus given to the relationship between the fieldwork component and the rest of the degree programme. This will ensure that students are able to see the connections between field and class work. Examples of good practice were seen when there were

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2 HESA figures show that there were 3,100 full-time undergraduates studying archaeology in the academic year 2004/5.
clear and explicit links between the fieldwork being undertaken and the rest of the degree programme. Negative experiences often revolved around a lack of understanding of the relevancy of their fieldwork, often closely, but not exclusively, linked to the issue of assessment.

- **Assessment is a contributory factor to positive fieldwork experiences:** Whether this is through direct assessment on site, the use of reflective journals, or even assessed work related to the project later in the year. Whilst there are obvious challenges, we would recommend serious consideration be given to the implementation of some form of assessment of fieldwork by all departments.

- **A high number of students expressed a wish to continue into a career in archaeology:** Only 18% stated explicitly that they did not wish an archaeological career. This is at odds with the numbers of those who are ultimately employed in archaeology, an area which needs further research to fully explain.

- **Students believe that universities should be providing at least some foundation for a career in archaeology:** Following on from the above point, not only do students wish to continue into a career in archaeology, but they expect their degree to provide them with at least some grounding for a career in the subject, even if they do not want to pursue a career in archaeology themselves. One way of supporting this is the involvement of professional units.

- **Areas of good practice often involved professional unit and academic departments working together:** Through involving archaeological employers in training students, universities can benefit from a wider skills-base and the employers can help train the archaeological workers of the future. Students gain a greater range of skills and techniques, as well as wider contacts and career guidance (of both the positive and negative aspects of a career in the field). However, it is essential that university staff are also involved, and that there is a good balance between understanding the practical aspects involved and the larger research frameworks being investigated. Additionally, for those students that do wish to gain extra fieldwork experience, it is profitable for universities to have greater links with both the profession and with other universities, with exchanges of students and skilled staff across excavations. This also provides an avenue for those wanting more specialised training, enabling easier access to a wider range of experiences that would allow them to make informed career choices.

- **There are a large number of transferable skills gained through fieldwork:** Whilst this is the case, students often do not realise or communicate the skills they are gaining. Research shows that reflexive learning can develop the ability of students to recognise and build on the skills they are gaining (Kolb 1984; Honey and Mumford 1982). This does not need to be at odds with subject-specific knowledge or research; indeed, it can significantly enhance the development of subject-specific research skills too.

- **Education and training do not need to be opposed:** In terms of this debate, it seems clear that training in the field does not need to be at odds with subject-specific research and integrity; something
that most academics recognise in their own research agendas. Indeed, field-practice can enhance and complement education that is taking place through more traditional means. Thus, students learn along the expected routes, as well as enhancing their ability to reflect on their learning, and more crucially, communicate this to others, including future employers. If thought of in these terms it is evident that education and training are not mutually exclusive. Far from it, they are complementary and reciprocally beneficial.

- **Giving students responsibility within the interpretive process can enhance student experiences of fieldwork and beyond:** Within the field itself, issues of responsibility and supervision were repeatedly raised. A significant source of resentment by students was being taken away from the archaeology once anything ‘interesting’ or ‘important’ was discovered. On occasion this is inevitable, as some things are too rare for less-than-expert attention. However, in the majority of cases it would be feasible for the student to carry on with excavation under supervision, or indeed work alongside the expert, thus allowing them to learn, and to see the process of excavation through to the end. Additionally, in terms of responsibility, crediting students with the role they have played is desirable wherever possible, such as through including their names in site reports, as seen at some of the leading sites.

- **Considered thought about supervision and communication between staff and students in the field is extremely important:** Many students stated that they did not feel able to ask when they were unsure, believing they would appear foolish. This led them to feel out of their depth and uncomfortable with the challenges ahead of them. It is easy to forget when supervising that things that become second-nature often do first need to be learnt; even using a trowel can be a difficult and daunting task for those new to the field. Giving attention to teaching even the most apparently basic steps can go a long way. Whenever possible, nurturing an environment where it is encouraged to ask questions has very positive results. However, this process does not need to lead to ‘spoon-feeding’; there are ways of returning the questions to students, enabling them to think through issues and problems themselves ‘out loud’, thus eliminating the fear that if they carry on they will obliterate the archaeology, or worse still, the situation of a student that is too embarrassed to ask that they carry on regardless and destroy valuable archaeology.

- **There should be recognition that students contribute to the research process:** Linked to the above point is the fact that students are making a real contribution to, in fact are often fundamental to, research projects. That they are contributing to the creation of new knowledge through their excavation, recording and interpretations should be acknowledged and communicated to students.

- **Fieldwork provides an opportunity to readdress traditional inequalities in archaeological practice:** Whilst our study has shown that female students are still veering towards careers in ‘archaeological housekeeping’ whilst more male students intend to follow a career in field archaeology, it is important to stress that the practical realities of working in the field enable the development of a range of skills. Consequently students
should be encouraged to take opportunities to develop a broad range of skills regardless of gender, ability or background. Here the involvement of third parties can play a key role in providing positive role models for students that may encourage them to diversify their career aspirations.

Whilst many of the above recommendations may be expected or seem obvious, through collecting evidence to support the significance of fieldwork in the undergraduate degree it is anticipated that departments can now use real evidence to support their cases for the continuation, or even expansion, of fieldwork provision – an area under threat in many institutions. It is our belief that the story does not end here. More research needs to be undertaken into other non-classroom environments and learning spaces, exploring the value of learning through other types of practical engagements. Key to this is the question of different needs at different levels of the degree. Further research also needs to be undertaken into archaeological careers, addressing where students are ultimately employed, and why so few enter the archaeological workplace. There is also a need for investigating the demographic spread of students in terms of encouraging diversity and inclusivity in the discipline, an area that is necessary for the future sustainability of the discipline.

8. Acknowledgements

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We would additionally like to thank the members of the Archaeology Advisory Panel for their encouragement and constructive discussions, and Anthony Sinclair, the current Archaeology Subject Director, for his continued support of the project. Thanks are also due to Don Henson and Kenneth Aitchison for providing statistics for various areas of the report, Paul Everill for providing us with his PhD research, Thomas Dowson for editorial comments on an earlier version of this report, and especially to Paul Rainbird, Tim Darvill and Don Henson for their comments and suggestions (any errors are, of course, our own).
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10. Appendix 1

10.1. Student questionnaire season 1

University:

Project details:

Is this fieldwork residential?

Name:

Age: Gender: Year of Study:

How much excavation/fieldwork experience do you have?

What tasks have you so far undertaken on this field project?

What further tasks do you expect to undertake on this field project?

What do you hope to learn on this project?

Is your fieldwork assessed? Should it be?

Is your fieldwork compulsory? Should it be?

Would you like to do more fieldwork as part of your course? Why?

Are there any other areas of archaeology you would like to gain experience in?

How much fieldwork experience do you think an archaeology student should have before graduation?

How did you get a place on this project (through university or through your own research)?

Do you think your university should be responsible for organising your fieldwork placement?

Are you intending to continue a career in archaeology? If so, in what sector?

How has this decision been influenced by fieldwork?

How do you feel fieldwork will benefit your employment chances?

What transferable skills do you feel you are gaining?
Do you enjoy the fieldwork aspect of your course?

What have you so far most enjoyed about fieldwork?

What have you so far least enjoyed about fieldwork?

What were your initial expectations of fieldwork?

Have they changed?

How do you feel (or anticipate) that fieldwork experience contributes to the rest of your course? (in the classroom? essay writing, contribute/relate to theory etc…?)

In what way does fieldwork make a difference to your motivation and commitment to your course?

How important do you feel the social role of fieldwork is? (getting to know other members of your course/lecturers etc)

Do you have an opportunity to grade/assess your supervisors/directors?

If no, would you like to be able to do this? If yes, what do you feel you gain through this?

What do you feel is your contribution to the bigger picture? (heritage, local history etc…)

Why did you choose archaeology as a degree?

Have any of your close family members attended University?

How do they feel about your choice to study archaeology
10.2. Student questionnaire season 2

University:

Project details:

Is this fieldwork residential?

Name:

Age:     Gender:      Year of Study:

How much excavation/fieldwork experience did you have prior to this project?

What tasks have you so far undertaken on this field project?

What further tasks do you expect to undertake on this field project?

Is your fieldwork assessed?     Should it be?

How much fieldwork experience do you think an archaeology student should have before graduation?

Should it be compulsory?

Would you like to see more or less fieldwork in your institution?

Do you feel all students should be proficient at fieldwork? Why?

How did you get a place on this project (through university or through your own research)?

Do you think your university should be responsible for organising your fieldwork placement?

Are you intending to continue a career in archaeology? If so, in what sector? (If not, what is intended career?)

How has this decision been influenced by fieldwork?

Do you feel university should prepare you for a career in archaeology?

How do you think fieldwork will increase your employability? (What transferable skills do you learn from fieldwork?)

Do you feel there should be greater flexibility on a degree course to allow separate paths for those choosing or rejecting archaeology as a career? How do you envisage this would work?
Are there any other skills that you feel you could be taught or would like to learn as part of your degree, that would be of benefit to your future employment?

What have you so far most enjoyed about fieldwork?

What have you so far least enjoyed about fieldwork?

Is fieldwork as you expected?

How do you feel (or anticipate) that fieldwork experience contributes to the rest of your course? (in the classroom? Essay writing, contribute/relate to theory etc…?)

How does practical work enhance your experience as a student?

Is there anything you gain from fieldwork that you don’t get from the rest of your course?

What opportunity do you have to give feedback to your supervisors/directors? Do you feel this is sufficient?

How would you feel about being trained in fieldwork by a 3rd party? (i.e. ‘professional’ archaeologists)?

What do you feel is your contribution to the bigger picture? (heritage, local history etc…)?

What (if any) have been the implications of fees on the way you view practical experience?

Why did you choose archaeology as a degree?

Have any of your close family members attended University?

How do they feel about your choice to study archaeology?
10.3. Staff questionnaire season 1

Name:

Institution:

Project:

Type of project:

Aims for this season?

Is fieldwork compulsory in this degree course?

How much fieldwork does a student have to undertake to graduate?

Would you like to see more or less fieldwork in your institution? Why?

Do you grade student’s performance on site? If so, how?

Do you feel all students should be proficient at fieldwork? Why?

How do you feel fieldwork benefits the students?

Are there any skills learned on this project that would increase a student’s employability?

What opportunities does your institution offer for students wishing to undertake a more vocational degree?

Do you feel there should be greater flexibility on a degree course to allow separate paths for those choosing or rejecting archaeology as a career? How do you envisage this would work?

What opportunities do the students have to give you feedback on your performance on the project?

What would you say are the differences between this type of project and a developer-funded project?

How much does this fieldwork drive your own research?

How would you feel about a 3rd party training the students? (perhaps at level 1?) (i.e. ‘professional archaeologists)?

Has the introduction of university fees changed the attitude of students towards fieldwork?

How do you think student excavations have changed over the years?
ADDITIONAL SUPERVISOR QUESTIONS

What degree are you studying for?

How much field experience do you have?

Do you have any field experience working for a unit? If yes – how much?

Do you hope to pursue a career in archaeology? If yes – in what sector? If no why?

How does being a supervisor differ from being a student on this type of excavation?

10.4. Staff questionnaire season 2

Name:                  Institution:

Project:               Type of project:

Job Title:             Role on Site:

DIRECTOR ONLY QUESTIONS

How is project funded?

Student: Staff Ratio: Aims for this season?

How much compulsory fieldwork does a student have to undertake to graduate? Do you grade student’s performance on site? If so, how?

What provisions have you made (if any) for students with disabilities? Have you worked with many disabled students in the field?

If a public site, is there access for disabled visitors?
ALL STAFF QUESTIONS

Do you feel all students should be proficient at fieldwork? Why?

Do you feel a degree prepares students for professional archaeology?

How much fieldwork experience do you think an archaeology student should have before graduation?

Would you like to see more or less fieldwork in your institution?

How does fieldwork increase a student’s employability? What transferable skills do they learn?

How do you feel (or anticipate) that fieldwork experience contributes to the rest student’s courses? (in the classroom? Essay writing, contribute/relate to theory etc…?)

How does practical work enhance the student experience?

Do you feel there should be greater flexibility on a degree course to allow separate paths for those choosing or rejecting archaeology as a career? How do you envisage this would work?

Are there any other skills that you would like to see included in the degree that may benefit students career prospects?

What opportunities do the students have to give you feedback on your performance on the project? Do you feel this is sufficient?

How does this fieldwork affect your own research?

What do you most enjoyed about fieldwork?

What do you least enjoyed about fieldwork?

How would you feel about a 3rd party training the students? (perhaps at level 1?) (i.e. ‘professional’ archaeologists)?

Do you think student attitudes have changed/are changing since the introduction of fees?
During the summer months of 2004 and 2005 the archaeology team of the History, Classics and Archaeology Subject Centre (Higher Education Academy) carried out the most comprehensive survey of the opinions and experiences of archaeological fieldwork amongst archaeology students and staff in the UK. Our aim was to investigate perceptions and expectations of fieldwork in archaeology at undergraduate degree level in Britain. In this report we outline the background to the study and detail the methodology used – involving interviewing participants on site and gaining first-hand insights into their experiences. We also discuss the results of the 504 questionnaires collected, including a consideration of demographics, career options, relationships between fieldwork and the broader degree, issues of responsibility, and the education vs. training debate. We conclude with some recommendations for departments and staff, drawn from examples of good (and not so good!) practice, as well as suggesting further ways forward for research into fieldwork and education.

“Archaeology has been a field-science for more than 300 years. The theory and practice of fieldcraft has long been recognized as a key component of archaeological degree programmes in the UK, and for most students provides an enjoyable and recognizably important component of their studies. For the first time ever, this report provides us with a snapshot of how fieldwork opportunities are perceived and understood across a wide spectrum of archaeology programmes.”

Professor Timothy Darvill, 
Chair of the Archaeology Steering Committee 
for the History, Archaeology and Classics 
Subject Centre