



Institute of  
Archaeologists of  
Ireland

**Discussion document  
for the Institute of  
Archaeologists  
of Ireland**

on the RIA Forum,  
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**Archaeology in Ireland: A vision for the future**  
**Edited by Gabriel Cooney, RIA September 2006**  
***Summary and Overview***



In September 2006 the Royal Irish Academy held a forum to discuss the current state of and future prospects for archaeological research in Ireland. Directed discussion sessions followed a number of presentations given to an invited audience from across the profession.

The document sets out seven key actions based on six key findings. An overview of the findings and recommendations of the forum is given under six headings, with recommendations distilled from the discussions which took place summarised for each. The discussion followed a series of nine presentations. The first of these, the keynote address given the evening before the forum, reviewed current practice in Europe, which falls into broadly three systems, all of which are based on the same legislative principles. The next day topics such as research in the commercial sector in Ireland and in England, the state of State archaeology and the background to the current state of archaeology in Ireland with suggested remedies, were among those dealt with. An hour and a half of wide-ranging discussion followed, which was guided both by speakers within the audience and by advance documentation which laid out observations on the current state of the profession.

The aim of the forum was to discuss the current state of and future prospects for archaeological research, though, perhaps inevitably, the emphasis on the day seemed to be more on the current practice of Irish Archaeology.

The report falls into three sections. The first outlines the current difficulties as perceived by the different sectors of the profession, and the manner in which those difficulties have been acknowledged. Most pertinent are the publication of the Foresight Report on Irish Archaeology, and the task set for the Heritage Council by the (then) Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to carry out a review of archaeological research in Ireland as an input into the formulation of a strategic plan for archaeology. This report was submitted in January 2007.

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The second section details the issues and opportunities facing the profession. These points were set out in the briefing documents given to all participants in order to guide the discussion. Twelve main points were made.

- Huge changes have occurred in the profession in the last ten years; over 1,000 people are now employed, with over 75% of these in the consultancy sector.
- While changes have taken place in both the state sector and university departments/schools, these are largely the result of institutional and state policies; in the state sector responses to the increase in archaeological activity are noted as 'focused on the short-term rather than being strategic in character'.
- The establishment of the IAI is important; but there is now a perception that the IAI predominantly represents the senior professionals in the consultancy sector, rather than the profession at large.
- The level of publication remains the same as it did ten years ago, but the level of public dissemination of information through various media, websites, lectures and site visits, has increased, thus increasing public awareness. However, it is noted that the profession needs to differentiate and address the types of audiences that it should be engaging with.
- There is a major curation and archiving problem arising from the current volumes of work and the records this is generating.
- The fact that the profession does not speak with one voice on a variety of issues, mostly in relation to the appropriate mitigation of development-led projects, has led to a level of distrust among professionals, and there is a lack of time for strategic, long-term thinking.
- Research is fragmented across higher education institutions, the state sector and commercial companies. The infrastructure for research is poorly resourced and underdeveloped.

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- It is assumed that the pace of change and development will continue.
- It can no longer be assumed that archaeology is recognised as having a social and cultural value and given the level of spend, establishing this value has to be a central aim of the profession.
- The problems faced by the profession are island-wide, despite the different legislative frameworks.

The section concluded by stating that side by side with the challenges, there are opportunities, particularly for the funding of research, and in order to gain from that the real value of archaeology has to be measured in research and knowledge terms. Collaboration and partnership across all sectors and beyond are seen as the way forward. Various programmes including the National Development Plan and the HEA Strategic Investment Fund in 4th level Ireland are cited as sources of potential research funding that could transform Irish Archaeology.

The third section deals with the findings and recommendations of the forum which followed the presentations and discussions. These give rise to the seven key actions which are listed on the cover of the document. The seven key recommendations for the profession are that it should:

- Establish a national archaeological research fund to stimulate co-operative research, mobility and partnership across the consultancy, state and university sectors.
- Develop a specific national archaeological archive to ensure the preservation and accessibility of resources accruing from archaeological excavations.
- Develop additional mechanisms to enable and enforce regulation of the requirement to publish archaeological work.

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- Incorporate changes to the regulatory framework within the consolidation of the National Monuments Acts.
- Establish a bureau for archaeological publication to assess the scale of the publication backlog, recommend appropriate forms of publication and oversee the implementation of a systematic publication programme.
- Consider the resource needs of the state sector: the National Monuments Service and the National Museum of Ireland. Assign responsibility for the management of planning applications to archaeologists in local authorities.
- Conduct development-led archaeological projects in the context of a research design.

Together these recommendations offer a vision of a future, fruitful direction for Irish Archaeology.

## Discussion of Recommendations Implications for the profession



What are the implications of these recommendations for the profession? What changes have to be made to current structures and practices in order to initiate them? Does the Institute command a broad enough representation within the profession to encourage and facilitate dialogue across all sectors which will be necessary to implement many of the recommendations?

Some comments on the recommendations are given below. These are an initial review of the recommendations of the forum and it is up to the membership of IAI to read the document for themselves and come up with their own comments. It is highly desirable that the report is read by all the membership, and that its recommendations as published are discussed, debated and either amended, accepted or added to, and then acted upon.

- *A national archaeological research fund:* there are implications for consultancies such as a sabbatical system for staff, which would be desirable, but would mean the removal of key people from current work. The benefit of both publications and research which would better inform future work should out-weigh this. For those within the state sector where a sabbatical system is not available to them, to have such a facility would also allow re-engagement with research, and help develop their careers.
- *A specific national archaeological archive:* this is highly desirable, as the pressures of space, and specialised storage requirements are beyond the means of virtually all professionals to sustain indefinitely. Having a centralised repository should mean that access to the excavation archive of all excavations carried out by those in all sectors of the profession is possible under the one roof, again something that is highly desirable.
- *Mechanisms to enable and enforce regulation of the requirement to publish:* the type of publication required needs careful consideration, and the issue of publication occupied much of the discussion which took place. The form publication required must take cognisance of the nature of the site, its contribution to overall knowledge, and the benefit that different

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kinds of publication have to different types of audience. There is room for a much wider discussion on this topic. With regard to regulation, while there was agreement on the day that ensuring publication came down to enforcement, and that the market would respond if publication became mandatory, and properly funded, there are issues relating to the realistic timescales for same which were not addressed. For example, in the absence of sufficient specialists which can lead to considerable delays in post-excavation work, the timescale for full publication is often necessarily in years not months. In the meanwhile, other excavation work is undertaken. Proposals for all necessary post-excavation work, which include a timetable towards an appropriate form of publication, need to form a first step in the process, but equally need to be reviewed and monitored in a meaningful way by the regulatory authority.

- *Incorporate changes to the regulatory framework within the consolidation of the National Monuments Acts:* enforcement entails refusing further licences to those who without justification, fail to publish the full results of their excavations. An appeals process enshrined in the National Monuments legislation will be required. There are many issues relating to what can be practically considered full publication which will have to be taken into account, some outlined above. It is clear that there is a belief within the profession that enforcement is necessary, but where licenses are held by directors who are only temporarily employed by a company, where directors feel they have been given insufficient time or resources to publish, or where they do not have the necessary skills to produce a publication, there is a blurring of the issue of responsibility. It is imperative that it is established how the responsibility to publish will be met, both by the consultancy and the licensee, and, in the case of road schemes, by the NRA also, as there licenses are not issued and the responsibility for publication is seen to rest with the companies involved, as a general rule. Equally, where work such as rescue excavation is carried out without licence, as can be the case within the state sector, there may be no

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perceived compulsion to publish.

- *Establish a bureau for archaeological publication:* the role of such a bureau may be predominantly retrospective, though the aim of developing a systematic publication programme with different audiences in mind should inform current and future excavators. It is not clear whether the bureau would actively seek to enable those who excavated sites to publish them, or would employ specialists in a number of fields to publish the work of others. It is undeniably true that many would welcome professional collaboration in the write-up of excavations. However, would those who actively wish to write up their own sites be facilitated by such a bureau? There is an inherent danger of creating cadres of technicians and professional writers/academics. It is notable that many doctoral and post-doctoral personnel see their role as being in the context of research and writing, rather than actively participating in excavation within a commercial environment. The benefits of such people to projects at the excavation stage are immense, but under-emphasised.
- *Consider the resource needs of the state sector: the National Monuments Service and the National Museum of Ireland. Assign responsibility for the management of planning applications to archaeologists in local authorities.* Resource needs for the state sector have to be considered in terms of the changes to the profession overall. If the NMS is to successfully evaluate the quality of excavation works, and the reports produced, then additional resources, or redeployment of existing resources, may be required. The National Museum is considerably understaffed, and this affects the perception of the relevance of the Museum as a repository of material, a source of advice and a source of information to the wider profession. The deployment of archaeologists within Local Authorities should be a very positive step, but the relationship between them, the National Monuments Section of the DoEHLG and the individual Local Authorities would need to be defined.

## Discussion of Recommendations Implications for the profession



- *Conduct development-led archaeological projects in the context of a research design:* site work is currently carried out under considerable time pressures with a short lead-in. There is frequently a disconnection between those doing the advance research works, such as EIA or EIS work, and those who do the site work, due to market forces. To enable this recommendation be a reality across the board the point at which full archaeological intervention is sought has to be as early as possible in the design stages.

It is clear that the general principles which underpin and enable archaeological work to be carried out depend on continued political belief in the intrinsic value of the work. It is imperative that all sectors strive together to see that this continues to be so. Indeed, without a commitment to and understanding of the value of the archaeological heritage - which includes that which is only revealed in the course of development as well as that which is available for public presentation and enjoyment - support for this work may gradually be withdrawn. Preservation by record has got to mean more than the creation of a virtual site by means of a comprehensive archive. It must mean the delivery back to all interested sections of the community of something which enables the significance of that site to be understood in whatever context is appropriate – local, national or international. There is always great local concern with the material culture recovered from excavations, and there must be a practical means of addressing that also. To attract the financial support that is needed for this work and to fund the appropriate level of publication in various media, it is imperative that all sectors of the archaeological community increase their engagement with research for the benefit of the wider community.