

## FORUM

# Concluding Comment on Responses to *Under-Representation in Contemporary Archaeology*

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The responses to *'Under-Representation in Contemporary Archaeology'* are robust and thought-provoking and I get a strong sense that the proverbial 'can of worms' has been opened. In fact the lids have sprung on several differently labelled cans. The issues raised by the responses are diverse and individually particular. Collectively they encompass concerns of access to archaeological employment (see Boles, Hardy & Johnson), and the vicissitudes of uneven support and progression for those who stay in the discipline (see Hassett). At the heart of these responses lies the role of archaeology as a university subject, the implications of sticking with it as a career, and more widely 'who' or 'what' is archaeology 'for'?

In an institutional context, it can be most productive to strategically choose the particular 'battle to fight' at any one time. For example, the IoA Women's Forum has considered whether its focus should be extended from gender-related issues to the wider concerns of equality and diversity of access to the discipline. Until now the Forum has considered that isolating achievable departmental actions, some of which I have listed, is more likely to lead to constructive change, rather than the potential dilution of working

on a wide-ranging front. Alongside strategic actions, mentoring is valuable in tackling person-specific aspects of under-representation. A mentor has a longer-term trajectory of working through such issues and experiences, some of which may take time to unfold. As Hassett outlines, the possibility of gender-related issues affecting her career progression was not at all apparent to her in the early stages. A mentor also becomes better informed on potential issues of under-representation through the act of mentoring, due to an accretion of perspectives and experiences gained from several mentees. Hassett rightly notes the importance of sharing and profiling 'obstacles in career progression' and the key role of 'supportive networks' of which the TrowelBlazer Project is an excellent example.

Many professions are intensely competitive but the key stress points in a person's career are not necessarily at the same times in every profession. Shelley Adamo (2013), for example, has compared the lesser attrition of females in medicine in contrast to that of the biological sciences. She highlights how females undertaking careers in medicine are the more overburdened in terms of workload stress and lack of flexible working hours, but for most women the stage of the most intense competition in medicine is prior to family formation. She suggests that the reason more females drop

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out of academic careers in biology is because the most significant period of competition coincides with the age when many women settle into partnerships and have children. Understanding where the stage(s) of the most intense competition and attrition occur in archaeology and those who are thereby most strongly disadvantaged is important. This ought to facilitate better support and accommodation of socio-economic, cultural and gender inequalities in the initiation or continuance of university study and of career stages. Targeted bursaries and promoting greater flexibility in recognising a range of trajectories of progression can provide some support and recognition of the issues.

Johnson discusses how the growth of volunteering opportunities in archaeology can negate opportunities of paid employment for its practitioners. Hardy, in considering the structures of the archaeological and cultural heritage labour force, writes that archaeology is in danger of becoming “an elitist, unpaid experience open to those that can take time out from working” and that cultural heritage workers are particularly vulnerable to this “exploitation and exclusion”. The UK has a long-established tradition of amateur/volunteering archaeology. The origins of this lie in the numerous county and national learned societies established in the 19th and early 20th centuries - and the emergence of the Council of British Archaeology in 1944 as an educational charity to promote public support and understanding of archaeology. Today, I would guess, the greater the number of available volunteering places is in museums and galleries, followed by volunteering in non-commercial, community-based fieldwork. It is the very existence of these opportunities to participate in archaeology and cultural heritage that significantly fuels the public popularity and support for public funding of these subjects. So does a tradition of volunteering in archaeology reduce the opportunities for trained archaeologists to gain secure, paid or adequately remunerated early career employment in heritage or field archaeology? Volunteering is a fundamental component

of all graduate's CVs. Volunteering indisputably adds to the expertise that can be listed on the career CV of successful archaeologists. Volunteering aids networking and establishes links with institutions and commercial enterprises. Volunteering also allows for the development of skills and experience outside degree work (Flatman 2011). However, if the period between volunteering and gaining employment is protracted then there is an undeniably and increasingly strong socio-economic barrier of entry to and progression in the profession. This is not easy to resolve and in part relates to where public heritage funding lies in national economic priorities. Quite simply, here ‘quick fixes’ are not obvious. Pragmatically, the possession of an archaeology degree does, as I argue below, make a graduate highly employable in a wide range of professions.

A vocational career in archaeology/cultural heritage is less cushioned than academia from economic up and down turns. For example, with the current accelerated planning processes in the UK there is an unpredicted increase in the number of archaeological works on brownfield sites, thus expanding the labour market in commercial archaeology. I was recently told of one unit's current concern that now they could not find enough professional staff to hire. However, as both Hardy and Johnson strongly highlight, there are those who work in vocational archaeology who feel that their skills are not being adequately rewarded or formally respected with job security. In the UK, the Institute for Archaeology (IfA) has an important role in improving this situation. While it does not act as a trade union, joining the IfA allows the demonstration of professional credentials and is a professional body that can press for appropriate standards of pay (Aitchison 1996).

Boles' response focuses on UK-based university teaching of world archaeology and the sustainability of graduate careers in non-Western archaeologies. He notes the “trend towards the nationalisation of archaeology in the developing world is something that

needs to be considered in the structuring of courses, particularly at undergraduate level". Specifically, Boles notes that "to be an Africanist, with expertise relating solely to a single geographical area, may become untenable for those of us at the early stages of our careers". Working anywhere, and all the more so in places where we are cultural interlopers, can only take place with the consent and engagement of the local communities and authorities. This engagement widens local access to the technologies and expertise that richer nations and universities can provide. We thereby help communities to be recorders and custodians of their own heritage. This engagement also importantly confronts academics more directly with the implications of documenting and working with the heritage of others. For example research results may lie in opposition to local beliefs about the past and the ascribed meaning of things. These are central issues of critical heritage studies. Boles' paper notes the increasing appointment to academic and heritage positions of indigenous practitioners. Rather than possibly seeing this as diminishing the number of openings for non-local regional specialists, it will provide opportunities to create dynamic partnerships that in the longer term will create more research opportunities, more recognition and designation of World Heritage landscapes, and more funding for all. Such partnerships widen the interpretative debates, and promulgate new questions about and possible meanings of the data. In engaging in global archaeology, the IoA offers an exceptional array of regional specialisms, skills and critical perspectives. Particularly, given such a context, I strongly support Boles' approach of gaining diverse skills alongside a regional specialism. His considered response to the shifting contexts of teaching, research and funding that a world archaeology approach generates opens up a helpful debate.

Archaeology as a discipline is not unusual in having more graduates than the number of jobs available. In part, this is responsible for some of the tensions discussed above. In

the past archaeology has suffered from being pigeonholed as a specialist, vocational degree. It is important that archaeology is fully realised as being a route to many other careers and professions. Archaeology provides skills, ways of thinking and perspectives for life that are of deep relevance to people of all cultural traditions and socio-economic backgrounds. The discipline increasingly promotes the immense value of an archaeology degree. Archaeology provides ways of thinking, understanding and finding solutions to both the local and the big issues of humanity. Archaeology provides a superb grounding for a professional life, irrespective of the career embarked upon. It develops teamwork, combines arts and science skills and provides perspectives, values and explanations that offer alternative assessments and greater insights into the conditions of the present. Clearly the debates here initiated by a consideration of *Under-Representation in Contemporary Archaeology* highlight the many challenges of a career in archaeology. However, the breadth of archaeology as a discipline is a powerful and inclusive educational force in representing cultural diversity and multi-vocal perspectives. At its best, it channels the knowledge of things created and changed by people in the past into informing and *widening* our responses to, and responsibilities in, the present.

## References

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