



Statement on Proposed Cuts to Higher Education Funding for Archaeology in the UK

The International Society for Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology (CAA) represents researchers, professionals and students working in diverse capacities to bring together the strengths of digital, computational and quantitative methods with creative, critical and impactful archaeological and heritage work. As the Executive Steering Committee of the CAA community, we are writing to express our collective dismay and concern about the proposed cuts to Higher Education funding for high-cost subjects like archaeology by the UK Government, the proposed compulsory redundancies to colleagues at the [University of Chester](#) and [University of Leicester](#) and the potential closure of the Department of Archaeology at the [University of Sheffield](#). Whilst we recognise the current financial challenges, the proposals are short-sighted and undervalue the contributions of transdisciplinary subjects like archaeology which actively build connections between natural sciences, social sciences, computing, data science, creative practice, the study of the past and the construction of heritage.

The Department for Education has recently set out [guidance](#) for the Office for Students which include proposals to prioritise funding for high-cost subjects which it deems to be strategically important – specifically STEM subjects and subjects which support the NHS, healthcare policy and/or specific labour market needs. These proposals also include a 50% reduction in funding for high-cost subjects, including archaeology, that do not support these priorities in 2021/2022. This would form part of a phased transition which the Department of Education have already indicated could include further reductions in future years. The magnitude of the proposed cuts will have huge ramifications for archaeology departments in UK universities, especially those in England, who are already under pressure to cut costs. Since 1st April, archaeologists at the University of Chester have been at risk of compulsory redundancy. On 25th May, the executive board at the University of Sheffield will decide whether to invest in the Department of Archaeology, close the department and make all staff redundant, or merge archaeology with another department and make some of the staff redundant.

The prospect of redundancies and closure places an intolerable pressure on staff who have worked tirelessly to continue to deliver world-leading teaching and research during a global pandemic. Moreover, it devalues the contribution of archaeology to the economy and its critical role in delivering public benefit across central UK policy initiatives related to environmental sustainability, liveable communities, health and wellbeing. The [proposed cuts](#) will result in a reduction in the number of trained archaeologists who enable the development of infrastructure and housing pivotal to economic recovery and underpin the heritage industry which generates an annual revenue of £31 billion through tourism. Beyond its direct economic contributions, archaeology is critical to the understanding of long-term interactions between communities and their environments and is positioned to make critical contributions to the development of a Green Economy by informing sustainable management strategies and investments in natural capital. Archaeologists and cultural heritage professionals equally play essential roles in the delivery of public benefit as part of plans to build liveable communities by informing planning. Heritage sites and landscapes around the UK have demonstrated [positive impacts](#) on individual and community health and wellbeing. Beyond the delivery of this wide range of concrete benefits, archaeology is a subject that tells the story of who we are and where we come from and is and should continue to be a source of enjoyment and connection within our communities.

An active, dynamic sector is essential to continuing to make these contributions to society. The field of archaeology is continually renewed through the energy and initiatives of new graduates entering the community as professionals, through the encounters of ideas generated through teaching in universities, and through collaborative research between academic institutions, industry and third sector organisations, and colleagues around the world. Archaeologists at UK universities have been at the forefront of the development of computational and quantitative methods in archaeology and heritage and in developing innovative approaches to bringing people together today through engagement with the past. We call on the leadership in Universities and Government to take action to address the current proposed cuts and closures and to continue to invest in UK higher education across all subjects which bring value, through diverse means, to communities, locally and internationally.

The CAA Executive Steering Committee