

Joint Statement from the British Academy Archaeology Section, the Heritage Alliance, and University Archaeology UK on the 2024–25 Curriculum and Assessment Review

We welcome the Government's commitment to reviewing the curriculum to ensure it is "*cutting edge, fit for purpose and meeting the needs of children and young people to support their future life and work.*" I write to highlight archaeology's unique potential to contribute to these goals and to address current gaps in provision.

The current placement of archaeological education primarily within primary-level history represents a missed opportunity. Archaeology, the study of the emergence of human cultures through material remains, is an inherently interdisciplinary subject, which addresses fundamental questions about the human condition. Inherently archaeology is a 'visual' practice - learning through 'seeing'/drawing/handling' - skills that have wide application in media and graphic fields. Archaeology offers an exceptional vehicle for delivering several key objectives identified in the review:

1. **Skills Integration and Real-world Application: Archaeology**

- **develops** critical analysis and evidence evaluation skills and promotes problem-solving through incomplete data sets
- **cultivates** a "hands-on" approach, allowing students to engage directly with primary sources,
- **encourages** the use of multiple techniques and perspectives to study material culture, from critical text-based analysis to ancient DNA and the conservation of buildings
- **enhances** both quantitative and qualitative analytical abilities
- **fosters** interdisciplinary thinking, blending key elements of the sciences, social sciences, and the arts
- **provides** a long-term perspective, relevant to helping mitigate the impact of issues such as climate change, social inequality, food security and migration¹

2. **Cross-curricular Learning: Archaeology**

- **bridges** both *within* STEM² and SHAPE and *between* STEM and SHAPE subjects³
- **supports** the development of research and analytical writing skills
- **provides** practical and fantastical applications for statistical and data analysis

3. **Diversity and Representation: Archaeology**

- **offers** perspectives on human diversity across time and space

¹ "It is arguable, but archaeology may be unique in this regard: combining the intellectual, analytical, and interpretive skills of a humanities degree; qualitative methods and social interaction (social sciences); computing, quantitative methods, and digital modelling (maths, IT); and scientific enquiry (biology, chemistry). Schofield J (2017) Archaeology: still the best degree. *Current Archaeology*.

² STEM subjects include scientific dating methods, environmental analysis and increasingly (digital skills, VR, AR, modelling - e.g. role of archaeology in the computer games industry)

³ Connects with **humanities** (history, geography, art and design, social studies), **social sciences** (Anthropology, Sociology, Geography), **sciences** (Maths, IT, Environment, Biology, Chemistry, Physics)

- **provides** tangible connections to local heritage and community identity
- **demonstrates** the multicultural nature of Britain's past
- **supports** understanding of climate change and human adaptation

Recommendations:

1. Integrate archaeological approaches starting in primary but particularly at Key Stages 3 and 4, where students can better engage with its methodological complexity.
2. Develop archaeology-based modules that support the review's goal of embedding digital, oracy, and life skills in learning.
3. Create assessment frameworks that value the unique analytical and interpretative skills archaeology develops.
4. Establish clear pathways for archaeology within both academic and vocational routes at Key Stage 5.

The organisations below stand ready to support the implementation of these recommendations through:

- Providing expert consultation on curriculum development
- Facilitating connections between schools and archaeological projects
- Supporting teacher training and resource development
- Offering guidance on assessment frameworks that capture archaeological thinking skills

This proposal aligns with the review's working principles by:

- Building on existing educational foundations rather than requiring revolutionary change
- Drawing on rigorous evidence about skills development and educational outcomes
- Supporting the goal of a broader curriculum that prepares students for future challenges
- Promoting inclusive education that reflects our society's diversity

Archaeology plays a crucial role in understanding and managing the UK's rich historic environment, which makes a substantial contribution to the national economy. The most recent data⁴ shows that in 2022, England's heritage sector directly generated £15.3 billion in GVA and supported an aggregate economic footprint of £44.9 billion when including indirect and induced impacts (CEBR 2024, p.8-9). The sector directly employed 201,000 workers - one in every 139 jobs in England - and supported a total of 523,000 jobs across the wider economy (CEBR 2024, p.9). Heritage tourism also generates significant economic value - in 2023, international heritage-related tourism alone contributed £12.5 billion in spending (CEBR 2024, p.52). As noted by English Heritage, with one in five UK properties built before 1919 and the need to retrofit older buildings to help meet net zero targets, the sector requires substantial skilled workforce development, with estimates suggesting the UK needs double the number of

⁴ Centre for Economics and Business Research (2024) The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy: An updated report for Historic England August 2024..

conservation-skilled contractors to meet the country's net zero targets by 2050, requiring an average 86,500 new workers per year to retrofit older buildings (English Heritage Written Evidence SFF0100, 2024, para 1.13). The integration of archaeology in school curricula is therefore vital not just for preserving and understanding our past, but also for supporting a sector that makes a major contribution to the UK's economic growth and employment. This integration would help ensure a future workforce capable of meeting the growing demand within the heritage sector while equipping individuals with the interdisciplinary transferrable skills necessary to thrive in a dynamic economy. This aligns with the British Academy's recommendations to promote a broader curriculum that prepares students for future challenges.

We would welcome the opportunity to contribute further expertise to this important review process.

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