

10 years of the NVQ in Archaeological Practice

Edited by Andrea Bradley MCI fA (1795), with contributions by Andrew Burn MCI fA (5184) and Chris Cox MCI fA (947)

Since 2008, the Level 3 NVQ in Archaeological Practice has set the bar for skills and knowledge required at entry level to the profession against a nationally recognised framework of competence – the National Occupational Standards.

Andrew Burn, now Associate Archaeologist with SLR Consulting, pictured in 2008 as a trainee with English Heritage for his NVQ portfolio.
© Andrew Burn



The NVQ was meant to broaden the sector's capacity by providing an alternative qualification for those without a degree. It was developed for ambitious school leavers, for career changers, and for those with specialist skills acquired on the job but no formal qualification to show employers. It also offered a means for graduates and postgraduates to distinguish their CVs in a crowded job market during the recession.

Over ten years we have learned that the NVQ isn't for everyone – it depends what skills you want to accredit and where you want to be employed in the future for it to have value. So, has the qualification done its job? We asked employers in commercial practice, some of our NVQ Assessors and previous candidates what they think.

NVQ holder: Josh Frost

Senior Community Archaeologist for schools, MOLA

In 2015 I left my job as a primary school teacher to explore new career options. The NVQ-based training programme at MOLA appealed to me because it offered me a chance to develop my skills within a professional environment. I learned key archaeological skills such as planning, section drawing, filling out context sheets and taking levels, and was able to put these into practice under expert supervision on MOLA's commercial sites. The combination of in-house training with getting out and working in the field gave me confidence, and the tools to communicate archaeological skills to volunteers on the Thames Discovery Programme.

Rachel Edwards, NVQ Assessor, with trainees at Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, 2017.
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Assessor: Rachel Edwards MCI fA (834) Consultant to Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service (WAAS)

For my candidates at WAAS the NVQ provides the structure for a nine-month programme, qualifying trainees for posts as archaeologists with the organisation on completion. All seven past trainees are still

employed there. The NVQ structure has created a wider-ranging training programme than would have been offered otherwise. While the pressure of work has made this challenging on occasions, the programme gives trainees experience in research, as well as both intrusive and non-intrusive site experience and an understanding of the context and organisation of site work.



Josh Frost, NVQ holder and Senior Community Archaeologist for schools, MOLA. © MOLA

NVQ holder: Rob Hedge PCIfA (8441)
Finds Specialist and Public Archaeologist,
WAAS

I confess: I was sceptical. I began my NVQ in 2012, on joining WAAS as part of the CBA Community Archaeology Bursaries Project. Many fellow CBA trainees were recent graduates or came from other professions such as teaching or museum studies. I came from commercial archaeology, I had a degree, I'd worked in archaeology for years. At first glance, I couldn't see what the NVQ could offer me that I didn't already have. But once I got it — thanks to my assessor's patience and diligence — it was brilliant for structuring my development as a public service archaeologist. The reflexive approach compelled me to document my progress and address my shortcomings. And, once the NVQ was complete, I was able to dust off and finally submit my long-dormant CfA application form.



Rob Hedge, NVQ holder, now Finds Specialist and Public Archaeologist at Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service.
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Assessor/employer: Edmund Lee
MCIfA (934)
Knowledge Transfer Manager, Historic
England

To achieve the 'A1 certificate in Assessing Learners', I had to gather a portfolio of evidence against a list of requirements, like you do for the NVQ itself. My A1 remains my only nationally recognised qualification since leaving university, and, along with my driving licence, is the clearest evidence I have of transferable skills and competencies from a 30-year career in archaeology. (At the time of writing I see there are 52 jobs paying £40,000+ requiring an A1 certificate on a popular jobs website). Like my A1, the NVQ not only has value in the historic environment sector, but also in the wider world, giving people a recognised way out of archaeology and into another field if that's the way they choose to go.



Ed Lee, NVQ Assessor and Knowledge Transfer Manager, Research Group, Historic England.
© Edmund Lee



Employer: Robin Jackson ACIfA (747)
Senior Archaeological Project Manager,
WAAS

The WAAS award-winning Training Programme for Field Archaeologists was developed in 2014 to help recruit field staff. By offering a properly waged and structured training programme with external validation and a nationally recognised and readily transferable qualification, we distinguished our offer from other employers — and were inundated with high quality applications in our first round of recruitment. We employ all seven ex-trainees; one is now in our outreach team and another has been

Robin Jackson, employer and NVQ supporter, receiving the Archaeology Training Forum Award for the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Training Programme for Field Archaeologist 2017. Also pictured, Natasha Powers of Allen Archaeology. © Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service

promoted on a fast track to Supervisor. Our recruitment issues have been solved and we now have a staff with a flexible skill set and professional perspective, invaluable for our relatively small organisation where agility is often needed.

NVQ holder: Nina O'Hare PCIfA (8520)
Archaeologist, WAAS

The strength of the NVQ is that it requires you to develop a range of experience in all aspects of practice, not just fieldwork. During my traineeship I participated in building recording, a museum archive transfer and attended the CfA conference. I also wrote an evaluation report and had a go at some GIS work. All of this helped me understand the planning context and what happens once off-site in the office, museum and HER. As a result, when I temporarily became restricted to the office for health reasons, I was able to help with other tasks including report writing. Since August I have moved into a part-time outreach post, and continue to write commercial reports as well, a transition that would have been difficult without the NVQ.



Johanna Roethe (right) with colleague Joanna Smith of Historic England undertaking historic area assessment of central Peckham in 2008. © Historic England, photograph: Derek Kendall

NVQ holder: Johanna Roethe
Architectural Investigator, Historic England

I completed the NVQ while training with English Heritage’s Architectural Investigation team. It helped to structure the activities in my training programme, formalising my learning and providing me with a tangible outcome and sense of achievement at the end of the year. If I could change one thing it would be the title: ‘Archaeological practice’ doesn’t reflect the breadth of the qualification, and might be off-putting for those who still think in terms of a dichotomy between archaeology and architectural history. I personalised my NVQ, using buildings-related projects and transferable skills to fulfil the requirements.

Assessor/employer: Sadie Watson
MCIfA (5532)
Project Officer, MOLA

In 2015 MOLA took ten trainees into an NVQ-based training programme. Basic fieldwork training was conducted in a public park (kindly supported by Tower Hamlets Council), allowing trainees to learn the fundamentals of excavation and recording. In January 2016 I was working on a major excavation on the London waterfront and the majority of the candidates then joined me and the MOLA team on site. Working closely with the candidates and having them together made assessing straightforward. Several of the successful trainees are now employed in various roles within the company. The combination of expert-led and classroom-based learning, as well as the requirement for focused mentoring, are what makes the NVQ work so well.



NVQ holder: Jacob Scott PCIfA (8928)
Director Heritage4D and Director of the Research Guild at Rochester Cathedral

Since completing my NVQ in 2015, I have helped to produce over 30 standing building reports, submitted my first peer-reviewed article to *Archaeologia Cantiana* and presented my work at the University of Kent. While still full time at the cathedral, I am also in the last year of my distance learning BA at Leicester, a course I started on the back of

Jacob Scott, NVQ holder and Director at Heritage4D and events team member at Rochester Cathedral. © Joseph Miller

finishing my NVQ portfolio, and will go on to a Master’s. I’m continuing to direct Heritage4D Ltd and have presented my work recently at UCL. I took the fast-track option to get PCIfA accreditation a year ago and am currently pulling together my application for Associate membership.



Sadie Watson, NVQ assessor and Project Officer at MOLA. © MOLA