

TOWARDS FLEXIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Title and Presenter:

Flexible attitudes to the employability agenda: curricula design in vocational and practical subjects – the example of archaeology

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Abstract:

Archaeology as an academic discipline has always struggled to define its position. It is an art and a science; it is an academic pursuit and a practical vocation. To this extent different degree courses have taken different viewpoints. Some instruct their students in a heavily theoretically-based approach to the subject, others provide extensive practical training; many courses fall between the two.

It is in the vocational world of archaeology that the paradox is more clearly felt. To enter the profession you *need* an undergraduate degree in the subject but many employers find a gap between what is taught at University and what is needed in the actual field. One employer's response to a recent survey typifies the gap: 'The UK university system does not prepare students for *any* type of professional archaeological work in the UK' yet the same survey found that 100% of archaeologists under the age of 30 had an undergraduate degree.

The archaeological profession is well aware of many of these issues but to what extent are these taken onboard by the Higher Education establishment and to what extent is their role? The profession has developed a range of National Occupational Standards, but these are often seen as 'add ons' for training after a degree – wouldn't it be useful to see these integrated into university education?

This presentation will review this current dilemma – should the profession be leading the academic curricula, especially when only a small portion of archaeology graduates pursue a career in the subject? It will also review an on-going project at Hull trying to map the National Occupational Standards to our Programme and Module learning outcomes. This presentation, although focused on one particular subject has wider implications for those struggling to grasp the employability agenda within their own discipline.