

Archaeologist

Archaeologists study how people lived in the past by studying the buildings, settlements and objects they left behind. They may specialise in particular geographical areas, historical periods or types of objects, such as pottery or coins. They may also carry out work relating to local authority planning.

The Work

You could be:

- identifying potential sites using a wide range of methods, including field walking, documentary research, satellite imagery, aerial photography and surveying
- working on field excavations (or 'digs'), tracing evidence of previous human land use, such as buildings, objects, bones, coins, seeds and animal remains
- cleaning and preserving any artefacts found
- analysing, interpreting and dating excavated materials, using methods such as laboratory testing
- using specialist computer software, such as computer-aided design (CAD) and geographical information systems (GIS) to record and interpret data
- protecting archaeological sites and managing fieldwork projects
- giving developers and planners advice on the implications of planning applications and work on sensitive sites
- writing and publishing reports, articles or publicity materials
- lecturing in universities, giving educational talks and presentations.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Archaeologists are not highly paid. Starting salaries for site assistants is around £23,000 a year. Experienced archaeologists earn between £27,000 and £36,000. Senior archaeologists can earn up to around £50,000, depending on the area of expertise.

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA), the professional body for archaeology, carries out salary benchmarking annually. This looks at the minimum, maximum and average pay for a sample of advertised job roles and reports on these according to the area of archaeology work and the CIfA grades - Practitioner, Associate and Member. In 2025, the following average salaries were reported:

- Practitioner (PCIfA) members - £24,677
- Associate (ACIfA) members - £29,648
- Member (MCIfA) - £32,555.

Conditions

- You may work in an office for part of the time.
- On excavations, you would work in all weathers, sometimes in cramped, cold and wet conditions.
- Your accommodation may also be basic, for example a tent, while working on excavations.
- You may work irregular hours.
- As much of the work is project-based, you will have to travel or move to different parts of the country.
- In a university post, you mainly work in lecture theatres and laboratories but you also lead field excursions for students.

Getting In

- The most common route is to take a degree (SCQF Level 9-10) followed by a postgraduate (SCQF Level 11) qualification in archaeology. There are many specialist areas of study in archaeology and a wide range of courses are available across the UK.
- The Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow offer degree and postgraduate courses in Archaeology, which you can combine with another subject. You need 4-5 relevant Highers at good grades for entry, and for BSc courses you need to have Maths or science subjects.
- The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) offers degrees in Archaeology, which you can combine with other subjects. Entry is 3 relevant Highers.
- At the University of St Andrews, you can study archaeology with a selection of degree courses, such as ancient history or medieval history. See the institution website for entry requirements.
- Alternatively you could take a first degree in an archaeology-related subject, such as anthropology, classics, geography or history, and study for a postgraduate qualification in archaeology.
- Postgraduate courses in archaeology are available at the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).
- Gaining voluntary work experience in museums or on excavation sites is usually essential. More information is available from organisations such as the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) and Archaeology Scotland.
- Joining archaeological societies may also help. For young people between the ages 8 to 16 years old the CBA runs the Young Archaeologists Club (YAC); there are seven branches of the club in Scotland.
- Entry into courses and jobs is very competitive.

You could work for a range of organisations including: Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, local authorities, museums, universities, National Parks, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and the Highways Agency. Others work for small, independent units or are self-employed as consultants.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- good communication skills
- an enquiring mind
- a keen interest in history
- excellent attention to detail

- good manual skills, for using tools and instruments.

You need to be:

- able to analyse and interpret data
- self-motivated
- methodical and well organised
- accurate in your approach, with close attention to detail
- patient and persistent
- able to work as part of a team.

Training

- Further training is normally on the job, under the supervision of experienced staff.
- You may also take short specialist courses relating to a particular aspect of the work.

Getting On

- This is a small profession and there is a lot of competition for promotion. It is likely that you will need to move around for job opportunities.
- It is helpful to gain membership of a professional body, such as the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA).
- If you wish to enter academic work in universities, you normally need a postgraduate research degree.
- Many posts are linked to short-term projects. If you work on field excavations, you may have to travel or relocate often.
- You may move on to work in areas such as conservation, heritage management or project management.

More Information

- You can visit the [Young Archaeologists' Club \(YAC\)](#) website for more information on groups in your area.
- You will find more information on courses, and job vacancies, in archaeology on the [British Archaeological Jobs and Resources \(BAJR\)](#) website. Vacancies are also advertised on the [CIfA](#) website.

Contacts

Archaeology Scotland

Tel: 0131 202 8064

Email: info@archaeologyscotland.org.uk

Website: www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk

X: @ArchScot

Facebook: www.facebook.com/archaeology.scotland

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA)

Tel: 0118 966 2841

Email: admin@archaeologists.net

Website: www.archaeologists.net

X: @InstituteArch

Facebook: www.facebook.com/CharteredInstituteforArchaeologists

Council for British Archaeology (CBA)

Tel: 01904 671417

Email: info@archaeologyuk.org

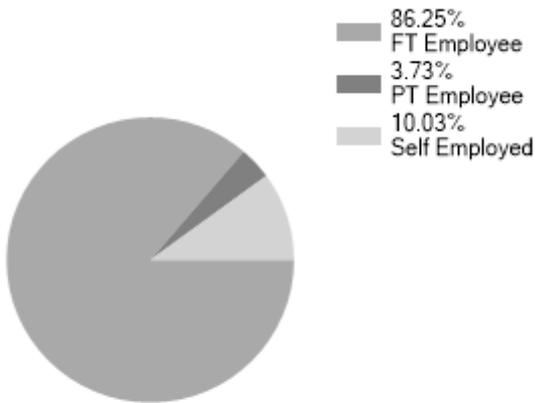
Website: new.archaeologyuk.org

X: [@archaeologyuk](https://twitter.com/archaeologyuk)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Archaeologyuk

Statistics

Employment Status UK %



Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.