

NEWS

Public Engagement at Archaeology South-East

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Business skills are a recognised skill shortage within the archaeological profession (Aitchison and Edwards, 2008: 106). Conversely, many small and medium-sized enterprises could benefit from the specialist knowledge that recently graduated PhD students could bring to their business. Recognising this, UCL Advances (the centre for entrepreneurship and business at UCL) manages a Knowledge Exchange Associate (KEA) scheme whereby exiting PhD students are hosted by businesses. Each KEA acts as a conduit for the transfer of knowledge from UCL to industry, with projects tailored to meet the needs of each business. In return KEA's are provided with challenging and creative project management experience and formal business training (UCL Advances, 2013).

During the 2012–2013 academic year Archaeology South-East (ASE), the contracts division of the UCL Centre for Applied Archaeology, hosted KEA Hilary Orange to manage a project which examined the challenges which commercial archaeologists face in incorporating public engagement (PE) within projects. With offices in London, Brighton, East Sussex and (since May 2013) Braintree, Essex, ASE provides technical services, consultancy and research for a wide range of public and private sector clients, but chiefly for construction companies and/or their agents (Perring, 2012).

The aim of the project was to maximise the potential public benefits of the work the company undertakes in relation to wider communities (both local and international). Project objectives included the evaluation of operating systems, identification of potential partnerships, the development of new social media platforms and PE skills training. In order to place the knowledge transfer elements of the project within a wider context research on PE within the broader industry was conducted, including an online survey of PE within commercial archaeology in the UK.

Commercial archaeology in the UK sits within a network of relationships including archaeologists, curators, clients, consultants and diverse communities. The industry also currently operates within the context of the global economic downturn (Aitchison, 2009; Flatman, 2011) and prevailing government policy. Since the early 2000s government policy has sought to make archaeology and heritage more accessible at both local and national levels (Hunter and Ralston, 2006: 41; 148; Perring, forthcoming; Southport Group, 2011). Recent revisions to planning guidance (PPS5/NPPF) place new emphasis on identifying the significance of heritage assets through consultation with local communities, in turn providing a new incentive for archaeologists to engage with varied publics in new ways (CLG, 2010; 2012).

While the commercial sector is broadly committed to providing public benefit through its services the problem of realising public

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outreach potentials has long been recognised (Southport Group, 2011). The tensions between the market model (archaeology as commodity) and the public model (archaeology for the common good) are linked to different interests and different ways in which knowledge is produced and disseminated (Kristiansen, 2009: 646). As Perring notes, these 'interests are not aligned' (forthcoming). In consequence, there can be a gap between vision and reality; as Parker Pearson and Pryor comment, 'What we would like to do and what we end up doing are often two different things ...' (2006: 316).

Commercial archaeologists face a number of challenges in regards to conducting PE, in particular, the need to employ cost/time-effective project management within a system of competitive tendering which operates within the market-based system of local planning control (Aitchison, 2009: 661; Flatman, 2011: 85–86; Hunter and Ralston, 2006: 38). Other barriers include, for example, short-notice and short-duration projects and client confidentiality issues (Southport Group, 2009: 12). Aside from HLF funding, it can be very difficult to fund public engagement activities and meanwhile the communication revolution has increased public expectation for digital access to information (Hunter and Ralston, 2006: 47).

Archaeology South-East has an established pedigree in providing high-quality community archaeology events and programmes including site open days and talks to local groups and societies. Staff at ASE regularly contribute to UCL Institute of Archaeology lectures and seminars and in addition mentor under-graduate and graduate interns, school work-experience placements and community volunteers (Archaeology South-East, 2012). Having no need to provide knowledge transfer for such events and programmes, the KEA project focused instead on embedding a number of small-scale initiatives within ASE's culture and systems. Conceptualised as 'Micro-PE' these initiatives were designed to involve a large number of

staff, to be quick and easy to perform, and to be sustainable beyond the duration of the KEA residency.

In November 2012, ASE launched itself into the world of social media by joining the Twitter (@ArchSouthEast) and Facebook communities with both accounts managed by a team of ten staff. A team approach has a number of advantages over a designated staff member: it generates more varied content; it introduces different voices and viewpoints; and it is manageable in terms of an individual's workload (particularly given the rapid turnover of projects). Other members of staff supply content, for example, news on their talks, events, and posts on current projects. Over the first six months ASE gained over 300 Facebook fans from 20 countries with a notably strong following from the 25–44 age group and from fans living in the UK, USA, New Zealand and Italy. In the UK the majority of fans live in London and Brighton.

Facebook is a popular social media platform amongst ASE staff and needed no introduction while 121 Twitter-tutorials were delivered in order to train up the social media team and other members of staff 'guest-tweeting' from community archaeology projects; for example, in June 2013, Senior Archaeologist Simon Stevens guest-tweeted from the week-long Stances Archaeological Project, which works with schoolchildren in East Sussex (Stevens, 2010). Project Manager Jim Stevenson has successfully spear-headed a weekly tweet about a stand-out find from the archives – hashtagged #fivestarfinds (**Fig. 1**). In the first six months ASE's Twitter page gained 250 followers.

A 'Photo of the Month Competition' has also been successfully revived. Members of staff are invited to submit a digital image relating to ASE activities each month with the winning images feeding into the social media platforms, the company website and broader marketing strategies (see **Fig. 2**).

A number of ASE staff set up profiles on *Academia.Edu* – a social networking site for aca-



Fig. 1: A 19th-century, size 8, leather shoe found during excavation in London #fivestarfinds (© Archaeology South-East).



Fig. 2: Winner of the March 'Photo of the Month' competition. 'Once more unto the breach...', Charing Quarry, Kent (photo: Catherine Douglas © Archaeology South-East).

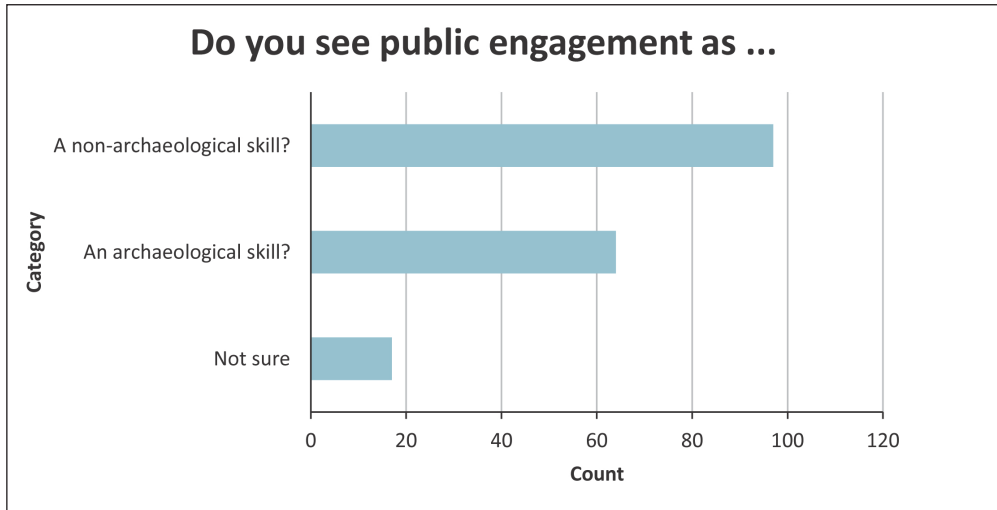


Fig. 3: Is public engagement considered an archaeological skill? The IfA report *Profiling the Profession* (Aitchison and Edwards, 2008) listed public outreach as a non-archaeological skill despite a reported rise in the number of designated posts in education and outreach (*ibid.*: 116, 135). Source of data: National Survey on Public Engagement in Commercial Archaeology May-June 2013, n=181 (© Hilary Orange).

demics with c.2 million registered users. The platform is open-access, has a high-rank on search engines and can be used by commercial archaeologists to share publications and talks, monitor impact, and follow research in particular fields (Cutler, 2012). An advantage of the site is that once a profile is set up it is relatively low-maintenance.

An online survey of ASE staff was conducted in February-March 2013 in order to collect data on attitudes toward PE, PE activity over the period 2011–12 and research impact. This survey achieved an 86.05% return rate. An adapted survey, consisting of 20 questions, was rolled out nationally in May 2013 (aimed at archaeologists who work in UK contract divisions (see **Figs 3–5**).

Micro-PE activities – a member of ASE staff undertaking a Twitertask for five minutes on a Tuesday morning or another adding a paper or talk to *Academia.edu* – may not have the razzamatazz of large-scale public-engagement events and programmes, but they are important and they deserve due recognition. As Parker Pearson and Pryor have noted (2006: 317): ‘We require a

sea change in professional attitudes to truly involve as many people as possible and to reach the parts we have never reached.’ A Micro-PE strategy provides a vehicle through which this sea change can take effect, PE becomes a more diverse range of activities which could be tailored to individuals’ particular roles, if it is built with sustainability in mind and if staff can take ownership and feel the rewards.

Employing a ‘Micro-PE’ strategy enabled public engagement to become a normal part of daily working life at ASE. Importantly, the characteristics of ‘Micro-PE’ imitate the main characteristics of the majority of work in commercial archaeology – adaptable and of short-duration. The KEA project provides a template for public engagement within the wider industry. As the vast majority of archaeological work in the UK is undertaken by commercial firms (Aitchison, 2009: 661; 90% of all investigations carried out in England since 1990, according to Fulford, 2011: 33), small changes in company culture and procedures can lead to large-scale impact across the sector.

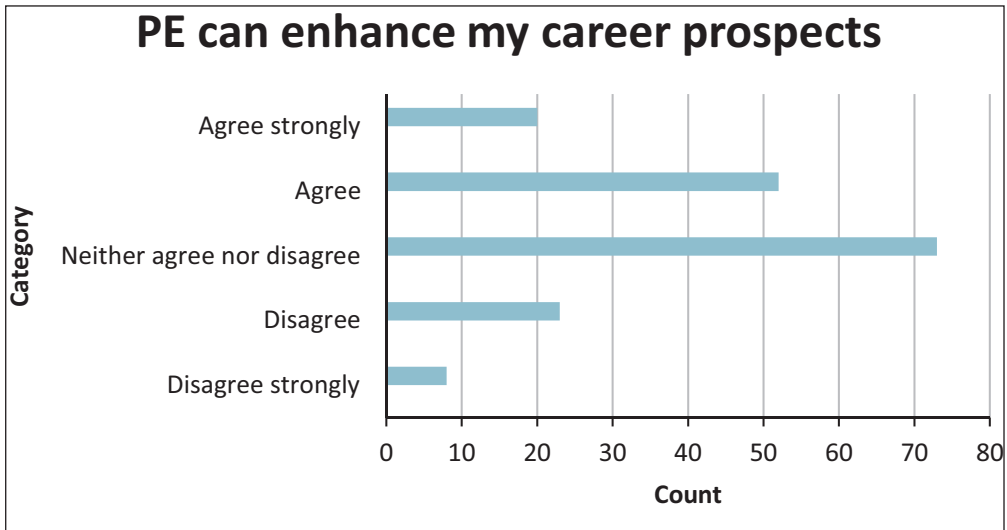


Fig. 4: PE is generally perceived as being benign or beneficial to individuals’ career paths. Source of data: National Survey on Public Engagement in Commercial Archaeology May-June 2013, n=181 (© Hilary Orange).

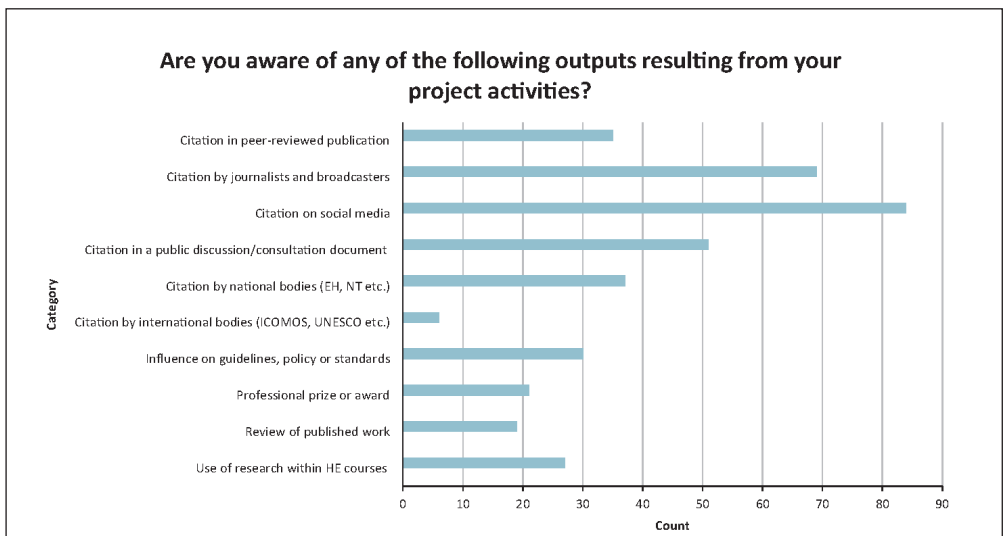


Fig. 5: The value of commercial practice as research. Categories adapted from REF (2014: 72). Source of data: National Survey on Public Engagement in Commercial Archaeology May-June 2013, n=181 (© Hilary Orange).

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