



# E F M N

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## Archaeology in Ireland 2020

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The Institute of Archaeologists &  
University College Dublin

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### Purpose

Since the 1990s there has been explosive growth in the number of construction and public works related archaeological excavations carried out in Ireland. As a result archaeology has become a business activity. It operates in a competitive climate radically different from that of the traditional university research environment. Although the primary purpose of archaeology is to create knowledge about the past, systemic failures have emerged with the result that most of the knowledge created in the course of construction related digs will effectively be lost to science. The goal of this foresight exercise is to bring together all relevant stakeholders, develop a vision for the role of archaeology in Irish society in 2020, propose recommendations that will address systemic weaknesses that have emerged along with the rapid growth in the number of archaeological excavations and propose additional measures to ensure an appropriate management of this important aspect of Irish cultural heritage.

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### Context and Challenges Addressed

#### Factors Driving Demand for Archaeological Services

An increase in the number of major infrastructural projects for road development, gas pipeline provision and urban-renewal under the National Development Plan have led to a rapid increase in the number of archaeological excavations carried out in Ireland each year. The number has increased from a level of 50 to 60 excavations a year in the mid 1980s to about

2000 excavations in 2002. This level of development is expected to continue at least until 2012 and possibly beyond.

Other forces will contribute to an increase in the demand for archaeological services. These include changes to land-use brought about by the amalgamation of farms and the destruction of ditches, earthen banks and field boundaries to create larger more uniform fields better suited to competitive agricultural production.

This will be accompanied by an increase in the land under forestry from the current 9.5% to about 17% in 2020. The development of forest will have an impact on the rate at which archaeological sites must be excavated and peat extraction will



continue to reveal new sites until Irish peat resources are exhausted in about 2015.

Technological developments in the use of Geographical Information Systems and new geophysical techniques applied to modelling and even prediction in the field of archaeology will continue to change the range of tools and services available in the future.

## The Current Status of the Sector

The number of archaeology consultancies advertising in Ireland has increased fourfold since the mid 1990s. The number of archaeologists employed in the private sector is 650 compared to an average of 13 to 18 full-time-research-equivalent archaeologists employed each year in academia throughout the last decade. Since 1970 there has been a 250% increase in the number of students taking archaeology at university. More than 95% of all archaeological excavation is now under taken by the private sector. Archaeology must now be considered a private sector business domain.

In the late 1990s the Irish Heritage Council identified a backlog of 1353 unpublished excavations. The current number is at least an order of magnitude higher than this. Most of the data created by private consultancies in the course of their excavations are not available to the research sector for further study. The quality of excavation reports is not uniform and only about 5% of excavation reports are suitable for publication. Most of these require further analysis and interpretation before they could be published. Much of what has been archived in terms of reports and unprocessed samples is apt to deteriorate with time.

Delays to the development of roads and other infrastructure caused by excavations and a failure to disseminate and communicate the value and significance of findings, has given rise to a growing public disenchantment with archaeology.

The institutional landscape of state bodies concerned with the protection and management of Ireland's cultural heritage is fragmented. It is no longer able to respond to current needs in terms of the creation and management of archaeological data.

## Issues and Challenges

The two main issues to be addressed in order to overcome the systemic failures identified above are:

- The lack of cohesion between compartmentalised operations and requirements of the different public organisations and agencies involved in archaeology
- The lack of knowledge created on the basis of the great volumes of data being generated by development lead archaeological excavations.

The main challenge for the future is to arrive at a series of institutional arrangements that can unlock the value inherent in the archaeological work that has been carried out and that will continue apace until about 2020. In essence this is the challenge of moving the emphasis away from the generation of data towards the creation of knowledge about our past.

## Methods

The main approach has been to identify and engage all major stakeholders, draft of position papers, invite commentary and support a process of mutual learning and deliberation in a series of consultative fora.

## Stakeholders

The major stakeholders involved in this process included representatives of:

- The National Roads Authority,
- The Construction Industry Federation,
- The Irish Concrete Federation,
- Private sector consultancies
- The Department of Agriculture and Food,
- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government,
- Bord Na Mona,
- The Department of the Environment NI (Northern Ireland),
- The National Museum of Ireland,
- The Heritage Council,
- The Royal Irish Academy,
- The Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland,
- The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland,
- Cork City Council, and
- Departments dealing with Archaeology at UCD, UCC and Queens University Belfast.

## Content & Findings

### Re-Positioning Archaeology in 2020

The current focus in development-lead archaeology is on the production of data or information and its management. A

vision of a 'Knowledge Archaeology' has emerged however in which due emphasis is given to archaeology as a source of knowledge-creation.

This vision is summed up in the term 'development-lead knowledge-archaeology'. The challenge now is to re-position archaeology in Ireland - dominated as it is by commercial archaeological activities - as a knowledge creating process.

This vision for the place of archaeology in Irish society in 2020 is informed by an observation that Irish society is changing rapidly and becoming increasingly culturally diverse. It is important to establish and interpret a good record of the past before important elements of the national identity and cultural heritage are lost for all time.

### Operational Considerations

An important lever could be the concept of value-for-money in the procurement of archaeological services associated to development projects. It is important that value is recognised in the creation of knowledge rather than in the generation of data. Procurement processes could consider service providers who create knowledge as providing better services than those who merely generate data.

To optimize the knowledge creation potential of development lead archaeology priority questions derived from an island-wide archaeological research agenda could be incorporated into the development-lead excavation project.

Significant discoveries made during excavations on the basis of current practise are not systematically incorporated in to the broader archaeological research agenda. Provision should also be made for the proper investigation of potentially new and unexpected insights and features in the course development lead-excavation projects.

Development lead archaeology should be incorporated into national archaeological research activities or much of the value potential in excavations will be lost.

The quality of excavation reports should be managed in a way that facilitates their systematic publication.

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## Strategic Initiatives

This process of re-positioning could be achieved on the basis of three strategic initiatives.

### An Archaeological Consultative Partnership

This consists of a consultative forum that comprises senior officials from appropriate government departments and development agencies together with senior archaeologists from relevant public and private organisations. Its role would be to maintain a high level dialogue that brings together the main stakeholders in Irish archaeology.

It would develop consensus on between the various interested parties on issues relating to archaeology in Ireland.

It could cover both the Republic and Northern Ireland and provide for cross border liaison on issues of common interest.

### An Archaeological Publications Bureau

It is now acknowledged that there is a need for a properly resourced system to manage excavation related publication. This is required immediately to address the backlog of unpublished excavation reports. There are already several thousand unpublished reports and at least 100 of these are considered to be of national significance. The first priority of the Publications Bureau would be to ensure the publication of backlog reports on sites of national significance. Publication should address not only the knowledge requirements of archaeological researchers but also those of the general public. Addressing this problem would cost somewhere in the region

of €2-3M per year over a five year period. Although this figure seems high it is much less than 10% of the current total expenditure on excavation. The second priority should be the publication of the backlog of excavation reports that are of significant regional significance. These publications would be smaller but more numerous and the bureau could aim at publishing about 50 booklets each year. Booklets based on future excavations would be published directly from the excavation reports supplied to the bureau in a standard ready for print format.

### Support for Inter-Institutional Collaboration

Although the Universities of Ireland all have good departments of archaeology, they face challenges due to the rising costs and increasingly specialised nature of modern archaeological field-work, fragmentation and a lack critical mass in their research activities. This situation could be improved considerably by support for collaboration that brought together not only the university based departments but other research institutions such as the 'Discovery Programme'. An annual budget of €1-2M would provide support for 5-10 substantial collaborative projects in archaeological education and research.

### Other Initiatives

These three main strategic initiatives should be supported by a range of other measures.

- The effectiveness of an Institutional Collaboration Fund would be enhanced by the development of a **National Research Agenda** for archaeological research.
- The **continuing professional development** of private sector archaeologists also needs to be addressed.

- **A broader educational approach to the environment** would foster a broader and more holistic understanding of archaeology and its impact on development, agriculture, landscape and the economy. This would embed thinking about archaeology in the logic of the sustainable development of Irish society.

Local authorities play an increasingly important role in the management of cultural heritage and archaeological resources, but there is **concern about the capacity of local authorities** to handle the rapidly increased work-load with the resources currently at their disposal. The National Museum of Ireland and the Ulster Museum house the bulk of the national collection of archaeological artefacts. However the stock of material recovered from development led excavation over the last 15 years has increased much more rapidly than anticipated and is likely to overwhelm existing provisions for storage. There is therefore an **impending crisis of curatorship** in the sense that the network of national as well as local museums galleries spanning the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland will not be able to cope in a meaningful way with the influx of artefacts from ongoing and existing excavations. Better field project communication and involvement of these players in local excavations is essential to the provision of an integrated high-quality service to the public.

A need exists for initiatives in the development of **archaeological practice**. Current practice is characterised by a disconnect between information generation and knowledge creation. Unless this issue is addressed directly and immediately Ireland will continue to invest in archaeological activities that ultimately have little meaning for society at

large. A number of specific issues need to be addressed in this regard.

Archaeologists routinely make comparisons and judgements about monuments and sites with a view to mitigating the impact of development and with a view to the full protection of sample monuments. An **Archaeological Grading System** needs to be developed to support this process in a transparent and scalable way. Such a system would provide a basis for:

- The allocation of resources and prioritising of initiatives,
- The assessment of grants to farmers under the Rural Environment Protection Scheme
- The state acquisition of significant monuments to ensure their full protection.

A **Monitoring System** is required to systematically monitor the survival and condition of archaeological monuments and sites. It is necessary to consider archaeological sites in their wider landscape setting and develop clear **Guidelines on Archaeological Landscapes**, their boundaries and buffer zones. The system for the provision of **Licenses** to excavate should be examined with a view to ensuring the creation of knowledge rather than the gathering of information and standards for **Quality Assurance** should be developed and applied. Finally measures need to be taken to **develop public awareness** of the role of archaeology and the significance of finds. Measures are needed to engage with and **build confidence among developers** and provide them with a system for resolving disputes and addressing their concerns in relation to archaeological amelioration processes.

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## Sources and References

**The Heritage Council Survey (1930-1997)** and the report **Archaeological Features at Risk** can be obtained from the heritage Council via their website at [www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie), by sending an email to [mail@heritagecouncil.com](mailto:mail@heritagecouncil.com) or by calling +353-56-7770777.

**2020 Archaeology - Knowledge Creation through Partnership, February 2005:** can be obtained from Dr. Muiris O' Sullivan – Department of Archaeology, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland. Email him at [muiris.osullivan@ucd.ie](mailto:muiris.osullivan@ucd.ie) or call him at +353-1-7168315.

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**About the EFMN:** Policy Professionals dealing with RTD, Innovation and Economic Development increasingly recognize a need to base decisions on broadly based participative processes of deliberation and consultation with stakeholders. One of the most important tools they apply is FORESIGHT. The EFMN or European Foresight Monitoring Network supports policy professionals by monitoring and analyzing Foresight activities in the European Union, its neighbours and the world. The EFMN helps those involved in policy development to stay up to date on current practice in Foresight. It helps them to tap into a network of know-how and experience on issues related to the day to day design, management and execution of Foresight and Foresight related processes.