

Keepers of the Past

LESSON 2

A Career in Archaeology



ARCHAEOLOGY
time in transition

IT'S ABOUT TIME 2

**Aim(s)**

To give the student an overview of the career path of an archaeologist.

**Objective(s)**

To familiarise the student with the academic qualifications needed to become an archaeologist and to draw attention to the specific areas of specialisation within the profession.

**Time Period**

Present Day.

**KEY INFORMATION****Lesson**

- Archaeology is a graduate profession.
- Archaeologists find full-time employment in Ireland today in a number of different areas.
- The work of the archaeologist can be very varied.

Context

- Most students who wish to pursue a career in archaeology do a post-graduate degree.
- The *National Monuments Service* section of the *Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht* employs archaeologists to work in its various units.
- Most archaeologists working in the private sector have to be eligible for an excavation license.

**METHODOLOGY & MEDIUM**

- Instruction
- Visual–PowerPoint
- **Student Handout** Archaeology as a Career

**SECTIONS**

Section 1 Academic Qualifications

Section 2 Employment

Section 3 Variety in the Job



Key Question(s) How does one become an archaeologist?

Slide 1 A Career in Archaeology

We will now look at the career path of an archaeologist.

Slide 2 A Graduate Profession

- Archaeology is a graduate profession.
- The universities provide a broad academic education in archaeology as part of a primary degree—Bachelor of Arts (BA).

(Only a small number of students who do a BA with archaeology as one of their subjects intend to pursue archaeology as a career).

Slide 3 Post-Graduate Qualifications

- Most students who wish to pursue a career in archaeology do a post-graduate degree—Masters of Arts (MA; MLitt; MPhil).
- Some students go on to do a doctorate degree (PhD), usually if they wish to specialise in some branch of archaeology.

Slide 4 Where Can I Study for a Degree in Archaeology?

So where in Ireland can you study for a degree in archaeology?

The four universities which have a Department of Archaeology are NUIG (top left), UCC (bottom left); UCD (top right) and Queen's (bottom right).

More recently the Institute of Technology, Sligo have a BSc degree in Applied Archaeology and the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology have a BA degree in Heritage Studies (which includes archaeology). There is also an MSc in Maritime Archaeology in the University of Ulster.

Slide 5 Field Trips

Whilst the university degree courses are largely academic with written exams, these courses also include

- Field trips to archaeological monuments.
- Field survey projects.
- Taking part in a training excavation.

Slide 6 Masters Degree

A primary BA degree usually takes three years. Most MA courses now take one year and include taught modules with written exams and a dissertation/thesis on a selected subject. At this stage most archaeologists begin to specialise on some particular aspect of the subject. How do archaeologists specialise?

There are many options available but the student is often influenced by a particular area of expertise within the Department of Archaeology they are already studying.

- Many have to begin by thinking about which period in time they are interested in. Some students are more interested in prehistory, others in the medieval period, or perhaps even in the archaeology of the 18th and 19th centuries.

- They may then specialise in some aspect of life in that period, like burial practice or settlement **patterns**.
- The choice is often narrowed down to studying a particular type of monument or artefact type.

To give an example of this, here are some titles of recent post-graduate theses

- The stone circles of Cork and Kerry: a study.
- The medieval pottery from the Dublin castle excavations.
- A study of the human remains from Tintern Abbey, County Wexford.

SECTION 2 Employment



Key Question(s) Where can I find employment as an archaeologist?

Slide 7 Where do Archaeologists get Employment?

Many archaeologists find employment in **the** Public Service. The main employers are the National Monuments Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the National Museum of Ireland. A number of Local Authorities also employ archaeologists in heritage centres, museums and in planning departments.

Other state agencies which employ archaeologists are The Heritage Council, The Discovery Programme and The National Roads Authority.

The University's Departments of Archaeology (UCC; UCD; NUIG & QUB) account for most of those employed in Academia.

Many archaeologists work in **the** private sector though the numbers working in the commercial sector expands and contracts depending on the rate of economic activity.

Slide 8 A Career in the Public Service

A career as an archaeologist in the public **service**

- Jobs for archaeologists in the public service are advertised in the national **newspapers**.
- These jobs are filled by competitive **interview**.
- Usually only candidates with a degree in archaeology are eligible for these interviews.

Slide 9 The National Monuments Service

The *National Monuments Service* section of the *Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht* employs archaeologists to work in its various units (see *Caring for the Past* T3,U4,L1)

- The Archaeological Survey of Ireland.
- Planning and Licensing Unit.
- The Underwater Archaeology Unit.
- Protection of Monuments Unit (see *Caring for the Past* T3,U4,L1).
- Conservation of National Monuments.

Slide 10 The Irish Antiquities Division

The other major archaeological branch of Government is the *Irish Antiquities Division* of the *National Museum of Ireland*. Archaeologists here are involved in the curation of the Museum's collection of archaeological artefacts (see *Caring for the Past* T3,U4,L1).

Slide 11 Other Official Bodies

Other official bodies which employ archaeologists are *The Discovery Programme*, the *National Roads Authority* and the *Heritage Council*. Archaeologists are now also working in the planning departments and county/city museums of a number of Local Authorities. (see *Caring for the Past* T3,U4,L1)

Slide 12 The Commercial Sector

A career as an archaeologist in the commercial sector

- Most archaeologists working in the private sector have to be eligible for an excavation licence.
- To become eligible for a license a candidate must pass an interview with the National Monuments Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

SECTION 3 Variety in the Job



Key Question(s) What variety is there in archaeological work?

Slide 13 A Variety of Archaeological Work

The following slides show archaeologists working in special archaeological environments and expertises

- Underwater (Maritime Archaeology).
- Bogs (Wetland Archaeology).
- Geophysical Surveying.
- Environmental Archaeology.

Slide 14 Shipwrecks

Shipwrecks are very important archaeological monuments as they can preserve a lot of information about life in the past. Here we see archaeologists recording the timbers of shipwrecks. Working underwater requires special training but the general principle of archaeological recording are the same as those on land.

Slide 15 Peatland

Another special archaeological environment in Ireland is peatland. Because of the waterlogged condition of bogs organic material like wood are preserved in the peat. The most numerous archaeological feature found in Ireland's bogs are toghers or wooden trackways. These were built to allow people cross the bogs and are preserved in the peat as it grew over them. Here we see archaeologists excavating a togher in advance of peat cutting by Bord na Móna. Below we see, on the left, some timbers of a trackway begin to appear as peat is being **harvested**. On the right is the same feature after being excavated and recorded by archaeologists.

Slide 16 'Geo-phys'

Anyone who has seen the Channel 4 series *Time Team* will be familiar with the term 'geo-phys'. This refers to *geophysical surveying* techniques like the *magnetic gradiometer* and *electrical resistivity*. Using these devices to measure sub-surface reaction to a magnetic or electrical current archaeologists are able to map long-buried archaeological features.

Slide 17 Geophysical Readings

Here we see, on the left a map of geophysical **readings**, and on the right an interpretative map of these features from an archaeological point of view. These illustrations are from work done for the National Roads Authority in advance of motorway construction.

Slide 18 Pottery Specialist

The study of ancient pottery is an important field in archaeology. Broken sherds (pieces) of pottery are found on most archaeological excavations (because they survive in the ground) and their study is a very specialised area.

Slide 19 Zooarchaeologists

Similarly, animal bones are also found on most excavations, especially those of domestic animals which have been butchered for food. Zooarchaeologists can tell much about the eating habits and environment of ancient times through the study of these bones.

Slide 20 The Study of Plant Remains

The study of plant remains, especially seeds, is also important for understanding past environments. Special techniques are used to recover seeds from soil samples taken from archaeological excavations (see *Post-X – The next step* T3,U3,L2).

WEB LINKS**WWW.**

Archaeology: A Career Investigation

<http://www.nra.ie/Archaeology/DownloadableDocuments/file,3434,en.pdf>

Archaeologist Career Details

http://www.careerdirections.ie/ShowJobFull.aspx?job_id=313



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There are very many options available but the student is often influenced by a particular area of expertise which the Departments of Archaeology they are studying in may have.

- Many have to begin by thinking about which period in time they are interested in.
- They then may specialise in some aspect of life in that period, like burial practice or settlement patterns.



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A career as an archaeologist in the commercial sector

- Most archaeologists working in the private sector have to be eligible for an excavation licence.
- To become eligible for a licence a candidate must pass an interview with the National Monuments Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
- The work of archaeologists in the commercial sector largely involves conducting archaeological excavations in advance of development projects.