



New apprenticeship set to transform heritage careers

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Heritage assistant Madison Reavis at a community dig as part of the Leven River Park Programme, one of the new initiatives to diversify opportunities in archaeology. (Image: Jennifer Charlton / Historic Environment Scotland)

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A new modern apprenticeship is set to change how historic Scotland is unearthed, and who has the opportunity to tell its story.

With new opportunities for school leavers, adult learners, and those without formal academic backgrounds, an archaeology modern apprenticeship scheme is being heralded as a turning point for inclusion in the heritage sector.

The traditional route into a career in archaeology is through university, but Cara Jones, Head of Skills and Development at the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIFA), believes that this excludes many potential professionals from the career.

Entry routes through university are “very narrow”, she said, and although Scottish universities have world-renowned archaeology departments, “university isn’t for everyone”.

As a result, she believes the workforce is closed off to a wealth of potential talent that could elevate the discipline as a whole.

In response, the CIFA is developing a new Archaeology Modern Apprenticeship with funding from Historic **Environment** Scotland (HES).

Ms Jones said the apprenticeship programme will be a practical, paid path into professional archaeology, which is distinct from the university route and can provide opportunities to individuals who gravitate more towards the technical side of the profession.

“We have lots of different types of learners in archaeology. I’ve got dyslexia, and one of the reasons I love archaeology is because of the practical elements within it. I learn by doing, and I learn very visually.

“Archaeology has always been perfect for me because it has allowed me to mix my love of history with actually getting out in the landscapes, seeing sights and understanding cultures that existed in the past.

Ms Jones also recognises that the apprenticeship can provide a more financially viable path into the profession for many people.

“With an apprenticeship, you’re paid to learn while you’re working. The modern apprenticeship is a fantastic opportunity to really develop the technical skills that employers need.

“So these apprentices are going to graduate with this incredible knowledge of the skills needed to be an archaeologist in today’s society.”

She said that casting a wider net in recruiting and training can only lead to a stronger professional environment and, ultimately, better work being done to understand Scotland’s past.

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“By offering these different entry routes into the sector, we’re enabling everyone and anyone who wants to have a career in archaeology to have a career in archaeology, regardless of their background.

“That is going to benefit us as a sector, because it will support us to have different voices and different perspectives, and that is going to have a really positive impact on the way we do our work, the way we interpret sites and the way we think about archaeology.”

An ongoing project at Leven River Park offers an early glimpse at how a shift in focus can breathe more life into the field of archaeology.



Workers at a community dig which forms part of the Leven River Park Programme, which is geared towards providing opportunities for community members and disengaged young people. *(Image: Jennifer Charlton / Historic Environment Scotland)*

Dr Paul Murtagh, Project Officer at Archaeology Scotland and Green Acton Trust said that a new skills development programme in the Levenmouth area will help young people who “may be disengaged from formal learning environments” find alternative paths to new careers.

“The aim is to help participants develop a wide range of skills and confidence, which will hopefully lead to positive destinations like further training or work.

“Participants will, of course, learn key archaeological skills, but more than that, we know that through developing these skills, young people learn a whole host of other transferable competencies through being on site,

including numeracy, literacy, communication, and critical thinking skills, amongst a whole host of others.

“Being outside, working as part of a team, in sometimes challenging Scottish weather, gives young people a sense of purpose and camaraderie, which also benefits things health and wellbeing. So while it’s great to find archaeological objects or dig a new site, the wider benefits of participating in archaeology are really significant.”

This expanded access is a key reason why HES has thrown its support behind the apprenticeship scheme, according to Head of Grants Dr Susan O’Connor.

“When this came forward as a grant possibility, we absolutely jumped on it. Archaeology is one of those sectors where, traditionally, it’s been very hard to get into if you don’t have at least a bachelor’s degree in it.

“So to have another route in is just fantastic, and takes some of the mystery out of the process to allow a totally different demographic to get involved.”

Archaeology provides an easy route into heritage work, Dr O’Connor said. People who may not visit a historic site might be more inclined to “get their hands dirty” and help out at a dig. Once in the trenches, however, it becomes clear what a career working in history can look like.



Historic Environment Scotland funds a variety of projects, including the museum and farm at Robert Burns Ellisland Trust curated by Adam Dickson. *(Image: Jennifer Charlton / Historic Environment Scotland)*

In this way, she said the new apprenticeship can open up both careers to new individuals who can help understand and preserve historic Scotland.

“We’re always trying to broaden the kinds of people who feel they can access heritage, because, particularly in Scotland, it’s all around us. We want people to think of it as their own, and that’s really at the core of everything we do.”

The apprenticeship will be developed as part of CIFA’s Platform for Success programme, which will also include a partnership with Skills Development Scotland.

As one of the first industry-led modern apprenticeships of its kind, developers believe that it can serve as a pilot programme for other “small bespoke industries” to develop modern apprenticeships that may help future-proof a range of careers.

HES has provided **£77 million to support over 350 heritage projects** in the past six years, including £1.74 million in projects in Scotland’s most deprived communities in the past year.

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