NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND

THE NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKFORCE: AN UPDATE

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In September–October 2003 Mary O'Keeffe and I conducted a survey of the archaeological workforce for a section of our paper on archaeological heritage management in New Zealand (Walton and O'Keeffe 2004). Fifteen months later, in February 2005, I decided to repeat the exercise. This was both to confirm that the information that we had collected earlier did indeed give an accurate picture of the situation and to add data relating to age. This would provide a basis for collecting data in the future.

The approach employed in 2005 was the same as that used in 2003. Because of the small size of the archaeological community we began in 2003 by simply listing everyone we could think of who we thought was earning a living, at least in part, from archaeology. This exercise was easier the second time around as I could build on the earlier results. I again checked the list of consulting archaeologists on NZAA web site (www.nzarchaeology.org) and extracted names of consultants from published and unpublished reports. I then asked for input from selected colleagues to check and extend our list.

As we noted at the time the approach we took in 2003 considerably overstated the position in terms of full-time equivalents. I have tried to reduce this by adding a test relating to current paid involvement in archaeology. This has particularly affected the numbers reported in the museum sector. The figures reported relate to individuals and not to full time equivalents.

All that was required to be considered was for the person concerned to be trained or have expertise in archaeological techniques and methodology and to be spending at least part of their time on archaeological work, including field work or laboratory work. Some individuals are inevitably borderline according to the rather imprecise criteria. I was, however, mainly trying to identify people with a record of working in archaeology. Individuals can easily enter or leave the market, and for our purposes doing a few archaeological contract jobs,

particularly as an assistant, or while studying for a degree, wasn't enough to get a person counted. Nonetheless, I envisioned a situation where one or two people who weren't considered for the first list might be added to the second because they had developed a record of working as archaeologists in the meantime. On the other hand, I also envisioned a situation where some individuals would be removed from the list because their recent and current pattern of work did not involve paid employment, their qualifications and experience notwithstanding. In the final analysis, the decision to exclude individuals was based largely on my perception that they are not actively involved in paid work in archaeology.

In March 2005 there were about 114 people employed, at least part-time, on archaeological work in some form in New Zealand. This compares with a figure of 111 on our 2003 list. This is a minimal difference allowing for the refinement in the eligibility criteria employed. Data collection should be better the second time around and small fluctuations in the size of the workforce itself are to be expected. It is most difficult to get good information on the private sector. At best all that can be said on these figures is that the workforce is steady or may be growing very slightly. While there is movement between jobs affecting some individuals, the overall numbers involved appear relatively stable. Two points are obviously not enough to establish any trends.

Comparing the two lists, 96 individuals appear in both. Fifteen individuals were removed, 18 have been added. Individuals moved off the list by leaving the country, by ceasing to be active in archaeology, by dying or as a result of the tightening of the criteria employed. Individuals moved on to the list by gaining a profile as working in archaeology.

The general picture we described earlier (Walton and O'Keeffe 2004) still holds. Most archaeologists (56%) are employed in the private sector as freelance consultants or contractors. This compares with 51% reported earlier. Any growth that is occurring is happening largely in the private sector. Some people were difficult to classify as they worked in both the public and private sectors or combined work for museums or educational institutions with work in the private sector or similar. Individuals were classified based largely on my perception of where the balance of their effort lay.

The results for the other sectors are also little changed. The Department of Conservation and New Zealand Historic Places Trust employ 18% (as opposed to 19%), universities 14% (unchanged), and museums 6% (10%). Challis (1995: 170) reported 22–23 people working long term in public archaeology in the government sector in the mid-1990s and the numbers have not changed significantly over the decade.

Most museums employ archaeologists primarily for their curatorial skills, not their archaeological expertise. The museum list is smaller than it was as a result of more detailed consideration of actual involvement in archaeology of the individual concerned. Museums are minor players in archaeology in New Zealand.

Of those employed by the Department of Conservation, none has a job description as an archaeologist. Their historic resources positions, some part-time, are open to individuals with any relevant expertise. The positions do, however, allow or require an involvement in archaeology and all the individuals listed do some archaeology as part of their jobs.

Archaeology is a graduate profession with over 55% having a master's degree and 33% a doctorate. A university degree with a focus on archaeology does not, by itself, provide sufficient training for a career in archaeology and learning on the job is necessary. The majority of graduates with archaeology degrees choose not to pursue a career in the subject.

As a group, universities have the best qualified staff, followed by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Department of Conservation archaeologists are the most uniformly qualified group and the private sector is the most diverse: ranging from those with no formal qualifications or a bachelor's degree to nearly 1 in 3 having a doctorate.

In terms of gender, 57% of the current workforce is male and 43% is female. The gender balance varies considerably across sectors, with the private sector coming close to a balance with 52% males and the universities having the largest imbalance with 75%.

The profile of the New Zealand archaeological workforce was originally compared with the situation in the United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States (Walton and O'Keeffe 2004) and the slightly changed new figures do not alter the picture (Table 1). The UK archaeological workforce (Aitchison 1999) is 4425 of whom 33% are consultants or contractors, 14% in local government, 8% in museums, 15% in universities, 15% in national heritage agencies (English Heritage etc.) and 15% in all others. In Ireland the archaeological workforce is about 650 and it is estimated that 77% work in the private sector, 11% in public sector, 9% in universities and 3% in museums (CHL Consulting 2002). According to Neumann and Sanford (2001) the United States archaeological workforce is about 5400 of whom 20% work in universities and museums, 30% are government (federal/state) and 50% are private sector. The percentages reported for the United States are presumably approximations. Allowing for huge differences in size of the workforces New Zealand is comparable with these countries in having a large private sector.

Table 1: Comparison of the workforce in four countries by percentage working in different sectors

	University	Museums	National heritage agencies	Local or regional govt.	Private	Other
Ireland	9	3	11		77	0
New Zealand	14	7	18	4	56	2
United Kingdom	15	8	15	14	33	15
United States	20		30 (Federal/ state govt.)		50	

Unfortunately, the only Australian figures available to me are for a period over a decade ago (Truscott and Smith 1993) and are concerned with permanent positions. Of 158 such positions identified in 1991, 64 were in cultural resource management, 58 were in universities and 35 in museums. At that time there were also 47 on the register of archaeological consultants. As at March 2005, 30 full and 69 associate members were listed in the Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists Inc. register of consultants (www.aacai.com.au/register/index.html). It has been estimated that as many as 450–500 people were employed in various capacities from permanent jobs to short-term contracts (Du Cros 2002: 5). It should be noted that the Australian and New Zealand figures are roughly comparable when considered relative to population size (Table 2).

The figures for population and area used in Table 2 were taken from www.geohive.com.global/world.php. It is intended only as a rough approximation, if only because the data on archaeologists was collected at different times. There is nothing unusual about the number of archaeologists in New Zealand either in terms of population or area.

Table 2: Comparison of the archaeological workforce in five countries relative to their population and area.

	Population in millions (2004)	Population per archaeologist	Area (km^2)	Area (km^2) per archaeologist
Australia	19.9	42,000	7,686,850	16,000
Ireland	3.9	6000	70,280	100
New Zealand	3.9	34,000	268,680	2400
United Kingdom	60.0	14,000	244,820	55
United States	293.0	54,000	9,629,091	1800

In considering the small numbers involved in New Zealand another set of comparisons may provide a useful perspective. According to the Auckland War Memorial Museum Annual Report 2002–2003, the Museum had 106 full-

time staff, 10 part-time, 40 casuals and 19 contract positions. Otago Museum, on their web site (accessed 17 February 2005), identify 72 staff in a variety of capacities. William Colenso College in Napier list 101 teaching and support staff for 2005 on their web site (accessed 6 April 2005). In summary, the entire archaeological workforce is about the size as the staff of a large museum or school.

Data on age was the most difficult to collect. In some cases I knew the ages of the individuals concerned to within 2–4 years. In most other cases, I knew to within about ten years how old they were. I used the date of post-graduate or PhD theses as a guide to likely age, assuming that individuals were most likely to be in their mid to late 20s at that stage of their career. This is an imperfect method if only because so many archaeologists had false starts in other careers before switching to the subject. Finally, I adjusted figures in consultation with a couple of colleagues. Allowing for all the uncertainties arising from imperfect data, both the median and the mean age of the workforce is 46. 28% fall within the 41–50 age group and 26% in the 51–60 age group. Nearly two-thirds of the workforce is over 41 and over half of this group may be expected to retire within 10–15 years. There will be students coming through who are undertaking short term contracts while continuing their academic training who aren't captured in the data. However, notwithstanding this, there does appear to be a lack of younger people in all employment areas—universities, government, and private.

In countries like Ireland, Australia and New Zealand the relatively small size of the archaeological workforce tends to exacerbate the professional issues relating to standards and training. The small market means that there is also less opportunity to acquire specialist equipment or maintain specialist skills. Thanks to good trans-Tasman air links we now tend to think of Australia as a near neighbour. It is far enough away, however, and the archaeology is different enough, that archaeologists by and large tend not to operate in both markets.

The growth of a workforce in archaeology, particularly in the private sector, is a relatively recent development. In all five countries considered most of the growth has occurred over 2–3 decades, accompanying the expansion of the economy and university education, and underpinned by cheap oil. These parallel developments have occurred in spite of significant differences among the countries concerned, and in spite of variations in their legislation and changing government commitment to historic heritage. From small beginnings in the 1970s there is now a small pool of individuals earning a living from archaeology in New Zealand, a large proportion as freelance consultants. The suggestion that "archaeology still occupies a relatively precarious and marginal position" (Walton and O'Keeffe 2004: 280) still seems apposite.

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