Chapter 3
Field Schools, Transferable Skills and Enhancing Employability

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3.1 Introduction

Recent archaeological literature in the UK has begun to draw attention to the fact that despite the recognised importance of fieldwork, little research has been undertaken into fieldwork processes and experiences. For example, in the volume *Critical Approaches to Fieldwork,* Gavin Lucas discusses how despite theorising archaeological interpretation, little is done to really analyse or examine how fieldwork is undertaken today (Lucas 2001:1–2). In the last decade, there have been some developments in this area which build on earlier observations by Hodder in 1997 (see Andrews et al. 2000; Bender et al. 2007; Cobb and Richardson 2009; Cobb et al. in press Lewis 2006 for examples of some accounts that have tried to address this issue), yet even as the discipline moves towards a more explicit approach to theorizing field practice, archaeological field training and the role of fieldwork in degree programs have received little consideration.

Despite the lack of explicit theorization, the Subject Benchmarking Statement (QAA 2007, and see Darvill 2008 for a summary of recent updates to the Statement), produced in the UK by the government, recognises the important role that fieldwork plays in the undergraduate degree. The statement asserts that

> … much of the best teaching and learning in archaeology will be an interactive process from which students and academics gain mutual benefit because of the research led environment for teaching. Students need to be encouraged to learn through experience, both as individuals and as members of defined teams, with practicals and fieldwork playing important roles in such provision (QAA 2007).

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There have been valuable local studies undertaken (Brookes 2008; Thorpe 2004), which support such assertions. However, even with the QAA supporting the importance of practical work, there was, until 2004, a lack of any real data on undergraduate fieldwork experiences at a national level in the UK.

This is certainly problematic given that a practical fieldwork training element is a central component of most single and joint honours archaeology degrees in the UK. Here undergraduate degrees are usually 3 years in length. They will typically include a narrower breadth of subject coverage than North American degrees, for instance, but will almost always include a taught component in archaeological field skills, or more generally vocational skills training. This can be provided in different ways, ranging from entire modules spent in the field during the academic year, to the more common format of teaching a field skills module in the classroom during the academic year, which is then complemented by (and often assessed during) a compulsory element of field training under taken during the summer months. The British academic year certainly lends itself to this well, given that it begins in September and ends in June, thus providing a long summer period during which training excavations are normally run. Of course the length of the summer is not necessarily a reflection of the length of fieldwork students are required to undertake, and this can vary quite extremely from 2 to 12 weeks over the entire length of the degree. In some degree programmes, students are encouraged to take even longer in the field, sometimes up to a year long placement in industry to develop their field kill.

Given the centrality of fieldwork in the disciplinary culture of archaeology, its role in the undergraduate degree, and the education vs. training debate in British archaeology (Aitchison 2004; Hamilakis 2004; Hamilakis and Rainbird 2004:52; Dowson et al. 2004; Stone 2004:6; Rainbird and Hamilakis and references within 2001; Collis 2000), examining what students actually want from their degrees is vitally important. Consequently, during the summer months of 2004 and 2005, the archaeology team in the History, Classics and Archaeology Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) carried out the most comprehensive survey to date of the opinions and experiences of archaeological fieldwork among archaeology students and staff in the UK (Croucher, Cobb and Brennan 2008). Our aim was to investigate perceptions and expectations of fieldwork in archaeology at undergraduate degree level in Britain. To do this, we visited 32 excavations that were either explicitly run as field schools or that provided training opportunities for archaeology undergraduates.

As well as being driven by the needs of archaeology departments and students, this project also arose out of a growing concern from archaeological employers that the graduates they are employing are felt to be inadequately equipped for a career in archaeology (Aitchison 2004, 2008). Consequently, by investigating the role of fieldwork and vocational training, the project aimed to develop a greater understanding of the debate, considering the positions, responsibilities and restrictions on universities, as well as the perspectives of students and staff on the issue of vocational training. This chapter highlights some of our findings, with a particular focus on transferable skills and employability.

3.2 Investigating the Role of Fieldwork in Teaching and Learning Archaeology: Methodology

To undertake a comprehensive survey that addressed staff and student expectations of the fieldwork experience, we decided we had to *speak* to both staff and students, rather than simply circulating questionnaires and/or reading course handouts. Interviewing people face-to-face would allow them to be more relaxed and forthcoming in their responses "in conversation" rather than having to find the time to write down their responses on paper.

Once we had decided that we needed to speak directly to staff and students, the location was considered; should we simply speak to people while at university? Although we are aware that speaking with students and staff in the university environment does have its merits, mainly in offering a distanced perspective, for this particular study we felt that gaining immediate responses was preferable. Consequently, we felt that through interviewing in the field, students would not feel the same restraint placed on them as by a classroom location. It is all too easy to gain a distorted picture of fieldwork once back at university, and while memories of the highs and lows may last, details of individuals' thoughts, opinions and experiences in the field soon fade. We therefore felt that speaking to staff and students while actually on site would allow us direct access to actual experiences. Following this decision, we advertised the project to all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offering archaeology in the UK and then responded to invitations from project directors to attend their excavations.

It quickly became clear that attending the excavations in person also gave us the invaluable opportunity to observe more subjective data – the general feeling of the site, attitudes, and emotions – essential components of any dig that could be lost in questionnaires. We participated in the projects as observers, and as we are all archaeologists, could situate ourselves within the site or lab dynamic. While our very being on site would have had some influence, it is hoped that our relaxed and informal approaches, and experiences of fieldwork, would enable greater acceptance and thus access to the opinions and experiences of students and staff. We could therefore pick up on the mood or "vibe" of the site, observe how students interacted with staff, as well as ask more detailed questions if we thought it was appropriate (see Edgeworth 2003, 2006; Everill 2006; Holtorf 2006 in the use of participant observation in relation to research into professional archaeology).

HEA staff undertook site visits over the summers of 2004 and 2005, visiting a total of 32 sites, and speaking with 434 students and 103 staff, representing 25 UK HEIs, 9 Further Education (FE) and Continuing Education (CE) institutions, 4 non-UK HEIs and 4 non-student volunteers (for further information on the demographics of participants see Croucher et al. 2008: Figs. 3.2–3.4). Of the students interviewed, 202 of these were entering their second year of study, and 175 their third year. These projects represent a broad spectrum of fieldwork approaches, all demonstrating different methods of training, with a wide range of tasks undertaken by students, including trowelling and excavation, surveying, planning and drawing, running

visitor tours, and for some, website updates. The running of these projects also covered a range of approaches; from the pure research project to the "summer school" directly set up to train students in archaeological techniques.

The questionnaires covered a variety of topics, from basic demographic questions to more in-depth interrogations of what was expected from fieldwork. Questions addressed whether fieldwork should be compulsory, the assessment of fieldwork, the length and amount of fieldwork, the role of fieldwork with relation to archaeological and non-archaeological careers, issues of responsibility, the role of professional contract archaeology organisations, feedback, likes and dislikes of the fieldwork experience, integration of fieldwork into the rest of the course, the implications of fees, and student opinions of their contribution to the bigger archaeological picture.

The process through which students and staff were selected for interview was largely random. At each site, we aimed to interview at least one third of all students present and as many staff as possible. However, in general we adopted a flexible attitude toward questioning staff and students; sometimes questioning participants as they dug, sometimes questioning them during break times and sometimes taking them aside while digging was going on. We subsequently evaluated the material and responses gathered to assess trends and perspectives, rather than focusing on individual institutions or projects. Our aim was not to "name and shame" departments where students highlighted negative experiences (as inevitably some did). The very involvement of sites and departments in this project, enabling us to interview and participate on site, demonstrates the commitment of all departments involved to providing a positive fieldwork experience for their students. Instead it should be noted that the negative responses we did receive (which were in a minority) provided as much valuable evidence as those cases of good practice, and these formed an essential component in informing our recommendations.

3.3 Investigating the Role of Fieldwork in Teaching and Learning Archaeology: Key Findings

This project has been the most wide-ranging exploration of archaeological staff and students in the UK. Based on figures for 2004/2005 from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, we interviewed over 10% of full-time UK archaeology undergraduates during the survey phase. This provided us with the opportunity to investigate the current state of practical provision and analyse the experiences of staff and students throughout the country. Some of our findings relate specifically to elements of the British Higher Education system (e.g. demographics, the role of tuition fees, etc.) and as the remit of this volume is for an international audience, these findings will not be discussed here (see Croucher et al. 2008 for further details). However, some of our findings are clearly applicable to the broader training of archaeology students, wherever their archaeological field school is held. In particular, we have identified issues of employability and transferable skills. Two specific points form the basis of our findings: fieldwork training has a significant impact on

student career choices; and despite this, students have trouble identifying that fieldwork training provides a high level of skills transferable to non-archaeological career paths. In the rest of this section, we will outline key findings on these.

3.3.1 Fieldwork Training, Archaeological Careers and Employability

Fieldwork has a huge role to play for students in influencing whether they wish to pursue an archaeological career. Our results showed that 58% felt that fieldwork has a positive influence on their decision to consider an archaeological (or related) career, with 29% finding their fieldwork had a negative impact on their choice to pursue archaeology. Just 13% felt that fieldwork did not have an impact on their career choices. These results are mirrored by research undertaken by Jackson into archaeology graduates. Of the 710 interviewees who had graduated in an archaeology or related subject, 92.5% had undertaken fieldwork, with 63% citing their experience as influencing their career choices (Jackson and Sinclair 2009:12). It is clear that fieldwork itself plays an important role in student career decisions, whether to pursue archaeology, or to consider a different area of employment.

The model of academic departments working with professional units is an ideal situation. Through involving archaeological employers in training students, universities can benefit from a wider skills-base and the employers can help train the archaeological workers of the future. Students gain a greater range of skills and techniques, as well as contacts and career guidance (of both the positive and negative aspects of a career in the field). However, it is ideal when university staff are also involved, with a good balance between understanding the practical aspects involved in fieldwork alongside the larger research frameworks being investigated. Additionally, for those students who do wish to gain extra fieldwork experience, it is profitable for universities to have greater links with both the profession and with other universities, with exchanges of students and skilled staff across excavations. This also provides an avenue for those wanting more specialised training, enabling easier access to a wider range of experiences that would allow them to make informed career choices.

Although at present there are no precise figures available, current estimates over the last decade have suggested that consistently only approximately 15% of archaeology graduates tend to follow a career in archaeology (Collis 2001). However, the actual figure may be higher, as suggested by Jackson and Sinclair (2009), where 39% of respondents were in archaeological careers, and a further 11% were potentially archaeology-related, although the sample may show a bias towards those remaining in contact with the archaeology sector (Jackson and Sinclair 2009), suggesting that at best only 50% of archaeology graduates remain in a related field. Our study demonstrated that while in the field student career aspirations are, at least temporarily, more focused towards an archaeological career path, in particular, as Fig. 3.1 demonstrates, 57% of the 434 students interviewed stated that they intended

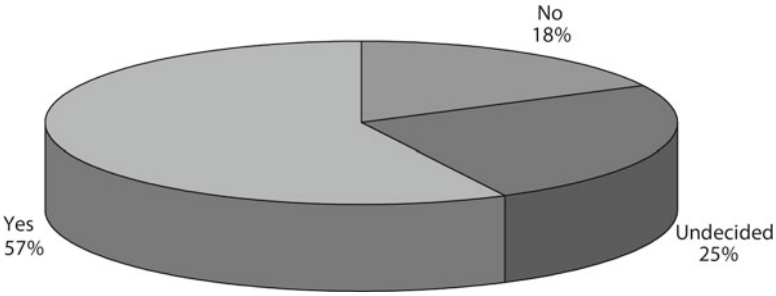

Fig. 3.1 Student responses to the question: "Do you wish to follow a career in archaeology?"

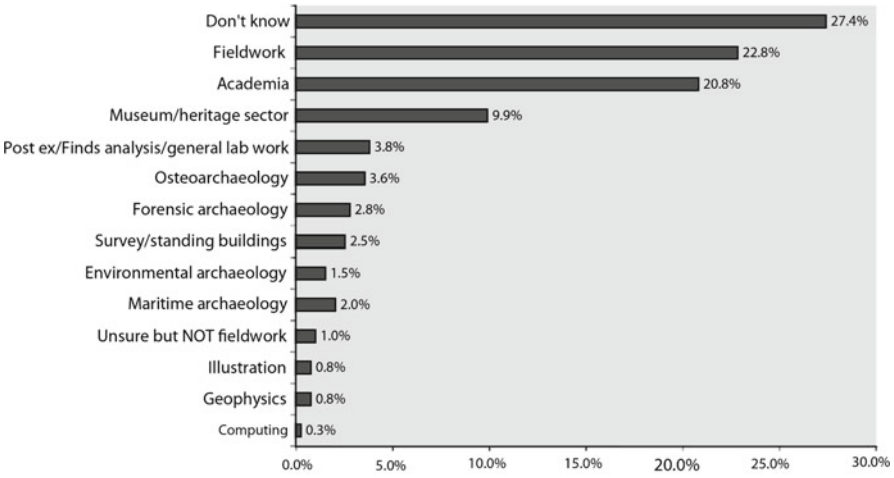

Fig. 3.2 Breakdown of the various archaeology sectors that students want to work in

to continue with a career in the subject, with a further 25% who were undecided. Significantly, only 18% of students offered a definitive "no" to following an archaeological career. Of those who intended to, or thought they might follow a career in archaeology, just over a quarter (27%) were unsure as to what area of the discipline they wanted to follow, however just over a fifth of all of those wanting to work in archaeology wished to follow a career in fieldwork (22.8%), and a similar number (20.8%) wanted to follow an academic route. The remaining 30% of students expressed interests in careers in the museum/heritage sector, and additionally a pursuit of specialisms, with finds-based options being particularly popular (Fig. 3.2). Research carried out by Jackson and Sinclair (2009) into archaeological graduates revealed that of 710 interviewed, 50% had wanted to become archaeologists at the beginning of their degrees, a figure rising to 55% by the completion of their degrees. Those not wanting a career involving archaeology rose from 16% at the start of their degrees to 30% by graduation (Jackson and Sinclair 2009:11).

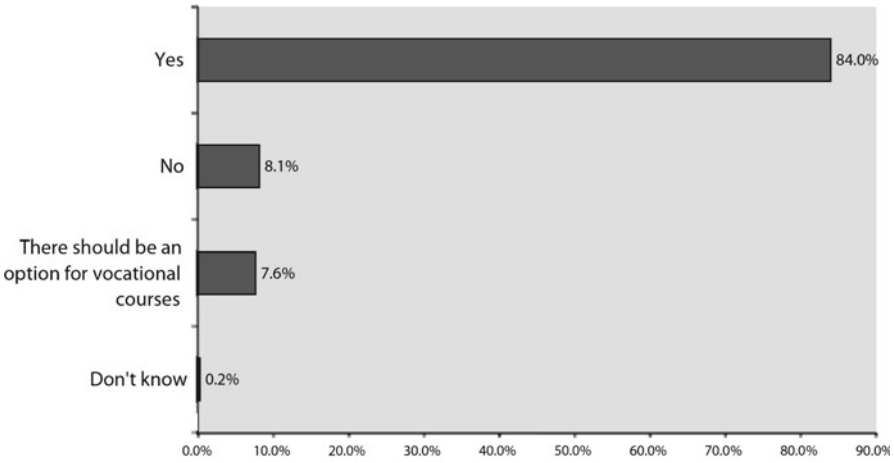

Fig. 3.3 Student responses to the question: "Should universities prepare students for a career in archaeology?"

While these results indicate that fieldwork training has a significant impact on student career choices, this raises a crucial dilemma faced by universities globally in terms of their role in developing employability in their degree programmes. While only a small percentage pursue archaeological careers (as low as 15%), the archaeological sector is still likely to be the largest single area of employment. This situation raises questions regarding the responsibilities of universities, and the archaeological profession, in terms of training. To examine this, we asked staff and students whether a degree should prepare students for a career in professional archaeology. As Fig. 3.3 demonstrates, an overwhelming 84% of students felt that it was the responsibility of the university to prepare them for an archaeological career. Here students regularly stated that "you are doing an archaeology degree so [it] should prepare you for a career in it" (AB501), and that "if I wanted a less vocational course I would have done something else" (JW511).

Student views contrast significantly with staff opinions (Fig. 3.4). Only 36% of staff felt that a degree in archaeology actually does prepare a student for an archaeological career, and 19% suggested that a degree only sometimes (depending on the student and/or institution) prepares the student for a career in archaeology. For those 18% who suggested an archaeology degree provided students only with "the basics", many suggested that this was because vocational training was an ongoing process. Here, staff such as AB198L argued that in undergraduate training "we go some way – producing apprentices, not excavating archaeologists". Although for the 26% who felt that archaeology did not prepare students for a career in archaeology, many argued that "it shouldn't". Staff members cited reasons such as "few other degrees produce practicing professionals; a degree is a foundation for the career. MA courses could prepare better" (KC019V). What seems most critical here is the clear disparity that exists in staff and student expectations as to the role of fieldwork within the undergraduate degree. Moreover, it is clear that there is little unity among staff in general as to the role the undergraduate degree should play in preparing students for a career in archaeology.

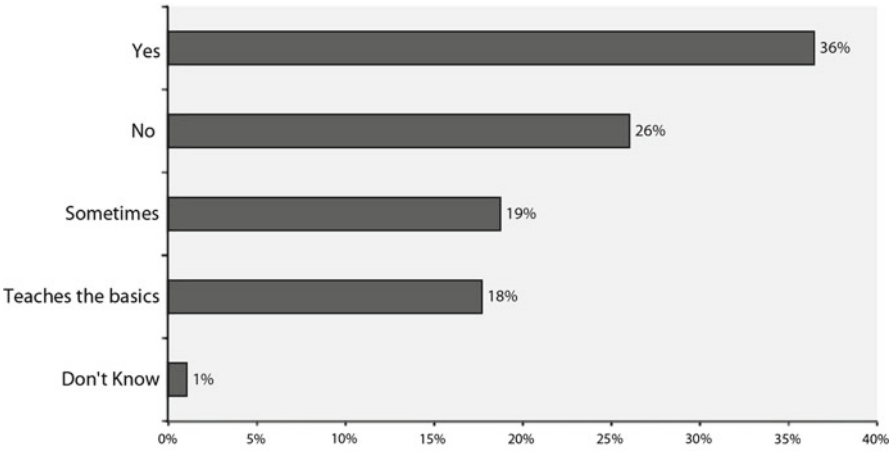

Fig. 3.4 Staff responses to the question: "Does a degree prepare students for a career in archaeology?"

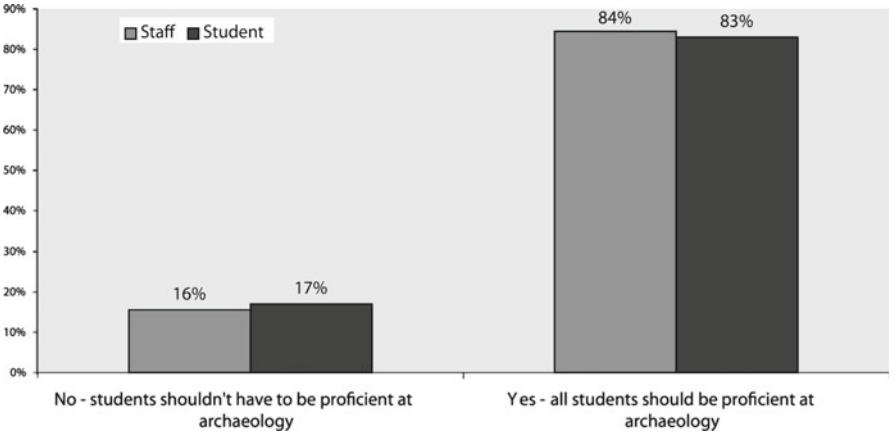

Fig. 3.5 Student responses to the question: "Should students be proficient in practical aspects of archaeology on completing their degree?"

This lack of consensus in the role of the undergraduate degree and fieldwork training more specifically is clearly troubling. Nonetheless, staff and students did agree when it came to considering the level of fieldwork proficiency students should obtain upon graduating. While many students recognised they would not be undertaking a career in archaeology, 83% still felt that having an archaeology degree should mean that students leave university being proficient in archaeological practices. This was also reflected in staff attitudes, with 84% believing students should be proficient at fieldwork when finishing their degree (Fig. 3.5). Overwhelmingly then, both staff and students (regardless of whether or not students wanted a career in archaeology) felt that archaeology graduates should be proficient in fieldwork when leaving university. This stands in stark contrast to the previous statistic that

showed 36% of staff thought that a degree did not prepare students for a career in archaeology, and in turn returns us to the key dilemma; should there be a global consensus on the responsibility of universities, and the archaeological profession, in terms of training undergraduates for a possible career in archaeology? Perhaps the most straightforward response to this question arises from our study; here we found that staff and students alike are confident of the importance of undertaking practical training to a reasonable level. Thus, while the definition of this level varies between students, universities and employers, striving for proficiency in core field skills provides at least some answer to the basic level of responsibility universities should have in preparing students for an archaeological career.

3.3.2 Fieldwork Training, Non-archaeological Careers and Transferable Skills

As we have discussed above, while a large number of students wish to follow a career in archaeology upon graduation, a great percentage of students do not continue into professional archaeology. Consequently, we examined the key question of the role fieldwork plays in equipping students with the generic and transferable skills that will be important no matter which career they choose.

Research carried out in 2007, surveying 710 graduates who had obtained an archaeology degree since 2000, revealed that those who didn't enter archaeology or a related field were employed in a range of sectors including business, marketing and finance, health and social care, law, IT and leisure and tourism (Jackson and Sinclair 2009:27). Both Jackson and Sinclair (2009:24) and Croucher et al. (2008) demonstrate that the skills archaeology graduates obtain are relevant to other careers. In a study of entrepreneurial employment routes in the humanities, fieldwork was repeatedly cited by many graduates as developing transferable skills (Croucher et al. 2008:17). However, there are certain steps that can be taken to ensure the most is gained from fieldwork for the future employability of students. These include assessment, reflexivity and communication.

In an increasingly competitive graduate employment market, an awareness of the transferable skills that an undergraduate degree provides significantly enhances students' employment chances. An archaeology undergraduate degree, and the practical component of this in particular, can provide a wide range of transferable skills that can be applied within other career paths (Aitchison and Giles 2006). Our study sought to examine whether students were aware of this, and how they felt their degree may enhance their employability. We explicitly asked what transferable skills were being acquired during fieldwork. When student and staff responses are compared on this question, the results mirror one another, with both staff and students citing teamwork most frequently. Following this, most students saw that they were gaining archaeological skills and general communication and social skills. Although less frequently cited, between 8 and 5% of student responses also noted aspects such as analysis, observation, initiative, organisation and responsibility, as key transferable skills that fieldwork provided them with (Table 3.1). More significant

Table 3.1 Responses by staff and students to the question "What transferable skills does fieldwork provide?" The relevant QAA Archaeology benchmark statements are given in italics

	Staff%	*Student%*
Teamwork	24.4	25.5
Collaborate effectively in a team via experience of working in a group, for example through fieldwork, laboratory and/or project work		
Social/communication skills	17.6	10.0
Present effective presentations for different kinds of audiences; (as fieldwork often involves working in new environments with minimal support) appreciate and be sensitive to different cultures, and deal with unfamiliar situations		
Employability in archaeology/fundamental archaeological skills	7.4	10.7
Observation/analysis/recording skills	11.9	7.3
Practice core fieldwork techniques of identification, surveying, recording, excavation, and sampling; practice core laboratory techniques of recording, measurement, analysis, and interpretation of archaeological material; observe and describe different classes of primary archaeological data, and objectively record their characteristics		
Independence/confidence building/initiative	6.3	4.9
Physical/hard work/hands-on skills	0.0	5.9
Organization/multi-tasking	4.0	4.7
Responsibility/leadership/management skills	5.1	4.4
Ability to work under pressure/persevere in hard conditions/commitment/determination	0.0	4.6
Learn to take orders/work in a disciplined environment	2.3	3.9
Time management	2.3	2.8
Problem solving	2.8	1.8
Draw down and apply appropriate scholarly, theoretical, and scientific principles and concepts to archaeological problems		
Numeracy skills	2.3	1.9
Select and apply appropriate statistical and numerical techniques to process archaeological data, recognizing the potential and limitations of such techniques		
Patience/accuracy	0.0	2.0
General (not listed) transferable skills	0.0	1.7
Written skills	0.0	1.2
Prepare effective written communications for different readerships		
Health and safety	1.7	0.8
Appreciate the importance of safety procedures and responsibilities (both personal and with regard to others) in the field and the laboratory		
Skills relating to other professions	0.0	1.1
Life skills/personal development	0.0	1.0
No skills	0.0	0.9
Computing skills	0.6	0.8
Make effective and appropriate use of C&IT (such as word processing packages, databases, and spreadsheets)		
Wider understanding of subject	2.8	0.4

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Surveying skills	4.5	0.0
Practice core fieldwork techniques of identification, surveying, recording, excavation, and sampling		
Research skills	1.7	0.4
Assemble coherent research/project designs		
Don't know	0.0	0.6
Only transferable skills relevant to (specific area of) archaeology	0.0	0.6
photography	1.1	0.0
Make effective and appropriate forms of visual presentation (graphics, photographs, spreadsheets)		
Finances	0.6	0.0
Assemble coherent research/project designs		
Interpretation skills	0.6	0.0
Discover and recognize the archaeological significance of material remains and landscapes; interpret spatial data, integrating theoretical models, traces surviving in present-day landscapes, and excavation data		

are the skills that few students mentioned. Less than 2% felt that fieldwork provided life skills, written, research, and numeracy skills, for instance. Also of concern are the gaining of abilities such as critical thinking, independent thought, and problem solving, with many students not realising, or at least not articulating, the role that fieldwork may play in developing these. Even more concerning was the small percentage of respondents that said they did not know what transferable skills fieldwork provided them with or that it did not provide any transferable skills at all. Student AB141, for example, said "you don't pick up many transferable skills in fieldwork – unless you want to be a navvy".

That students have little recognition of transferable skills is clearly problematic. In a global climate of financial downturn and recession, being aware of and then able to develop and maximise the skills fieldwork provides will ultimately be an important factor in enhancing student employability, whether students want to follow an archaeological or non-archaeological career path. Perhaps then in answer to the question posed above of whether there should be a global consensus on the responsibility of universities in terms of training undergraduates, a key responsibility could be to foster a more explicit understanding of the transferability of skills learnt in fieldwork (Table 3.1). In addition, we identified a series of other areas of fieldwork training that can be enhanced to develop student employability and awareness of the transferability of skills learnt in fieldwork. These include considering the roles of assessment, reflexivity, and communication in enhancing undergraduate understandings of the varied skills that fieldwork can provide.

Through stimulating reflexivity in the learning process, students are encouraged to consider their learning accomplishments. This includes recognising how they learn, and assessing their achievements. It is often the case that students are not aware of the transferable skills they are gaining through their fieldwork experiences (Table 3.1) or view their skills in very simplistic terms. For instance, while they may

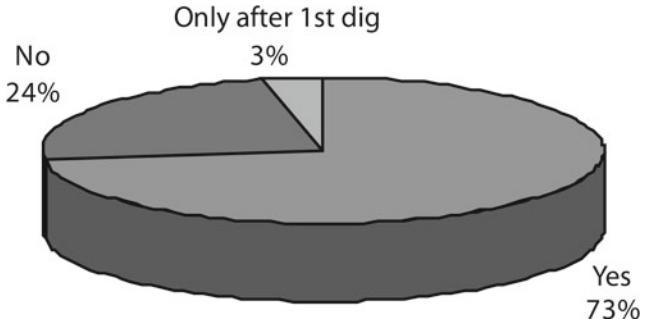

Fig. 3.6 Student responses to the question: "Should fieldwork be assessed?"

be aware that they can survey a grid or sort finds, they may not relate this to planning and organisation, analysis, and confident independent working or team work. Yet these are the broader skills that employers require interviewees to articulate. Through encouraging a reflexive approach, students are more likely to be able to recognise and articulate the skills they are gaining, as well as those that may still be needed. A key method for encouraging reflexivity is through assessment.

Assessment can play a key role in encouraging students to reflect on their fieldwork experiences. During our survey, we asked about the role of assessment, with 49% of students being assessed on their fieldwork, and 45% not being assessed (those that were not assessed also included second- and third-year students who had been assessed previously, but were not being assessed for their current excavation). Alarmingly, 6% of students did not know whether they were being assessed or not, which highlights communication issues within some institutions. We also asked students whether they felt their fieldwork *should* be assessed. Overwhelmingly, 73% answered that it should be (Fig. 3.6), with comments made including: "fieldwork should be assessed so you can see how much you have learnt" (student AB041) and "assessment is a reward for all of your effort" (student AB122). It was felt that progression could be both demonstrated and realised through assessment, as well as identifying areas for improvement.

During our study, it became apparent that assessment played an important role in motivating students, especially if fieldwork was taking place during vacation time and was compulsory. However, if it had no bearing on the outcome of their course, then students often seemed to lose interest very quickly. Incidences of resentment and anger at being "made" to undertake practical work were not uncommon. We also asked students "how does fieldwork relate to the rest of your course?", and "what are you contributing to the bigger picture?" Those answering negatively to these questions were repeatedly those students who were not being assessed. The relationship is not clear-cut and student experiences are not solely dependant on assessment, yet when assessment is in place, students are generally more positive and have a better understanding of their role within the archaeological project. This is also related to issues of communication, where students need to understand the project as a whole, and their personal contribution to it.

The assessment of fieldwork can also be especially beneficial for those who learn in different ways. Fieldwork provides real, hands-on experiences, making learning more tangible, especially valuable for visual and experiential learners; such experience is an essential component in the learning cycle of many students (Boud et al. 1985; Honey and Mumford 1982; Kolb 1984). As well as developing social, personal and communicative skills, fieldwork also demonstrates the link between theory and practice, helping students to understand field reports, and crucially promotes understanding of the methods and processes behind the creation of archaeological knowledge (Chap. 2). This enables students to develop critical thinking, analytical and interpretative skills and abilities, as well as providing an important arena for students to develop their understanding of archaeological career paths.

Through integrating practical training into the degree as something that can be graded, the students were given an opportunity to prove themselves in a forum other than a classroom (see Thorpe 2004 for a discussion of methods used to grade practical work). From our interviews, we heard comments from students who were not necessarily good at essay writing or more traditional academic pursuits, but proved themselves to be excellent students when given a practical task. By assessing or grading practical performance, it gives the students another chance to excel, using a set of skills that may not be developed through classroom learning. These experiences can be crucial for later employment and should be encouraged, giving students opportunities to excel in a wider field of activities.

Assessment can also be seen as a mechanism for ensuring that all students are aware of their roles on the project, and what they are learning. While these should happen regardless, in reality, students can often feel unguided; assessment provides an additional framework that ensures students are encouraged to think about their aims and achievements. If students are aware and thinking about their skills and achievements, including the transferable skills they are obtaining, they are already a step closer to being able to articulate these to future employers, or indeed to recognise the wide variety of other types of employment open to archaeology graduates.

There are various ways that assessment is carried out. Some excavation projects used log books or passports to assess tasks undertaken directly on site. Others used reflective journals alongside these, encouraging students to think about what they had learnt and areas for improvement. It is also good practice to relate assessment outside of the field to fieldwork, with a closer integration between fieldwork and the rest of the degree programme. It is important that students do not feel that their fieldwork is isolated and unrelated to the rest of their degree. Ideally, the relationship between fieldwork and the rest of the degree programme should be clear, with students able to see the connections between field and class work. Examples of good practice were seen when there were clear and explicit links between the fieldwork being undertaken and the rest of the degree programme. Negative experiences often revolved around a lack of understanding of the relevancy of their fieldwork, often closely, but not exclusively, linked to the issue of assessment.

Communication is also a vital element that should be further developed through the fieldwork experience. As well as encouraging reflection and an understanding of the skills gained, communicating these, both through writing and verbally, are essential

skills for graduates. Assessment often plays some role, especially with written communication (although presentations should also be encouraged), but there are other ways that students can be encouraged to reflect and communicate on site. Involving students in guiding visitors can have a huge impact, not just in their communication skills, but in encouraging students to see the bigger project, and their individual roles within it. Including students in site tours is also a positive step, encouraging students to explain their area of the trench to the rest of the group, including debates about ambiguities that rise, with students thinking about the interpretative process that happens both on and off site. Related to this point is the importance of giving students responsibility during the excavation process. A significant source of resentment by students arose from being removed from the trench once anything "interesting" or "important" was discovered. On occasion this is inevitable, as some things are too rare for less-than-expert attention. However, in the majority of cases, it would be feasible for the student to continue with excavation under supervision, or indeed work alongside the expert, thus allowing them to learn, and to see the process of excavation through. Additionally, crediting students with the role they have played is has a positive impact, for instance, including their names in site reports, as seen at some of the leading sites. Students who realised their names would be in print generally took a much more active and responsible role towards the excavation.

3.4 Conclusion

Through our survey of students and staff on archaeological excavations, there is no room for doubt as to the unique value and importance of the role of fieldwork in the archaeological degree. As well as providing social and personal development (an area that is a huge strength of archaeology as opposed to other subjects studying the past), fieldwork offers real professional development. Our survey illustrates the extent to which fieldwork provides both vocational experience and transferable skills. It is also fundamental in encouraging an understanding of the production of knowledge in the discipline. Comprehending the nature of archaeological excavation, the role of interpretation, and the idea that not everything is always factual or clear-cut is central to academic research in archaeology, and this is something the students stated they only fully comprehended after being in the field.

However, fieldwork experiences can usually be improved. Research shows that reflexive learning can develop the ability of students to recognise and build on the skills they are gaining (Kolb 1984; Honey and Mumford 1982). Assessment can play a key role, as it can encourage students to communicate and articulate the skills they have gained. The ability to recognise and communicate the vocational and transferable skills gained through fieldwork and the archaeological degree is essential for students graduating today, especially pertinent in the current global economic climate, where competition for jobs is set to become fiercer. It is essential that the unique skills offered through excavation are maximised and, crucially, recognised and communicated by those embarking on their new careers, either as archaeologists or in the diverse range of other career paths available.

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