

CBA Factsheet 3b: Studying archaeology at undergraduate level

Archaeology is a broad subject and therefore a degree in archaeology can provide you with a very good basis for a career in many areas, not just field archaeology. Many people choose archaeology as a degree because they are interested in the subject and after graduating go on to follow careers in business, politics, science, the arts and many other areas.

Most professional archaeologists now have a degree. It is difficult to gain employment in archaeology today without at least a BA or BSc degree. However, there are also many archaeologists actively engaged in fieldwork as a voluntary activity through local societies, which anyone can join.

In addition, there are many different approaches to studying archaeology, from methodological approaches (eg archaeology as a science or a humanity, marine archaeology, geoarchaeology etc) to period, civilisation or area-specific focuses (eg medieval archaeology, Egyptology, the archaeology of Scotland, etc). Therefore you should first consider what sort of archaeology you are interested in and pick courses that cater to your interests.

We have broken down our information into sections to make it easier for you to find what you need.

I'm considering studying archaeology at university, what should I do?

Archaeology degree courses can vary hugely in their focus; for example they may focus on Roman Britain, Archaeological Sciences, or Ancient Civilisations while others may offer a more general archaeology course. You need to consider what area of archaeology you are most interested in and therefore what skills and knowledge you wish to gain from a degree to help you find a job in that area of archaeology.

To help you place where each university is, an interactive map of UK universities is available at www.scit.wlv.ac.uk/ukinfo

Entrance requirements for degrees vary, and it is always a good idea to consult the admissions tutors in the departments in which you are interested (who can give more specific details) but in general you will need the equivalent of two A level passes as a minimum requirement for

all universities, although the required grades to get into your university of choice will probably be considerably higher than this. Some universities also run open days where you can visit and ask questions. We would recommend that if you can get to an open day you do so, as it offers an opportunity to check if the university and the course you are interested in is right for you.

What sort of degree courses include archaeology?

Archaeology is a broad subject linking with many others, including geography, history, social sciences, maths, physics, biology, chemistry, art, religion, landscape management, conservation, forensic science and technology; it therefore can be studied from many different perspectives. Generally, however, these break down into period/location-related perspectives (Medieval Archaeology, Roman Archaeology, Egyptian Archaeology etc) or discipline ethos-based perspectives: Archaeological Science, Marine Archaeology, Landscape Archaeology etc).

To help you find courses the following is a list of the possible degree titles related to archaeology. This list provides most of the degree titles although the exact wording may vary from university to university:

Single subject degrees:

- Archaeology
- Archaeological Science
- Archaeological Practice/Field Archaeology
- Bioarchaeology
- Biological Anthropology
- Conservation/Restoration
- Conservation of Objects in Museums/Museum Conservation
- Egyptology/Egyptian Archaeology
- Environment and Heritage/Landscape
- Evolutionary Anthropology
- Forensic Anthropology
- Forensic Archaeology
- Geoarchaeology
- Heritage Studies/Heritage Conservation
- Historical Archaeology
- Marine Archaeology
- Medieval Archaeology
- Nautical Archaeology
- Region/country-based archaeology (eg Scottish Archaeology, Welsh Archaeology, etc)

Combined degrees:

- Archaeology and a language
- Archaeology and a science
- Archaeology and Ancient History
- Archaeology and Anthropology/Social Anthropology

- Archaeology and Art History
- Archaeology and Biblical Studies
- Archaeology and Byzantine Studies
- Archaeology and Classics/Classical Civilisation studies
- Archaeology and Geography
- Archaeology and Geology
- Archaeology and History
- Archaeology and Landscape/Landscape History
- Archaeology and linguistics
- Archaeology and Palaeoecology
- Archaeology and Prehistory
- Archaeology and Slavonic Studies
- Archaeology of the Ancient World
- History and Landscape Archaeology

Some of these courses may be offered in both a 3-year degree, a 4-year 'sandwich' course (ie with a year's placement working in archaeology) or in some cases (particularly in Scotland) as a 4 or 5-year combined undergraduate and masters course.

Which universities run degree programmes in archaeology?

Many universities throughout the UK run archaeology courses and the number of courses and their course titles are regularly being updated, changed and developed to keep the degrees relevant. We keep an up-to-date list of archaeology-related courses at British universities on our website.

Alternatively you can search for archaeology courses on the UCAS website, www.ucas.com

NB: UCAS groups archaeological science with forensic science so if you want a science-based course you will have to search through these as well!

What qualifications will I need to get onto an archaeology degree?

As a general rule, the minimum entry requirement to get onto any university degree is the equivalent of at least two A-level passes. However, most university courses will set much higher entry requirements for entry onto their courses and the exact requirements will vary from one university to the next and will usually be listed in the university's prospectus.

As there are many different qualifications that university applicants have, UCAS (who run a centralised application system for universities) provide a guide to how other qualifications are equated to A levels by universities in the form of a 'points tariff' system. More information on this is available

from the UCAS Points Tariff page of the UCAS website, the link for which is www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff

Some universities offer an alternative entry method in the form of a foundation year. A foundation year is equivalent to the second year of A levels/Scottish Advanced Highers but is often specific to the broad subject area of the course you want to progress onto. eg Science Foundation Year for BSc Archaeological Sciences. Passing the foundation year at university will usually allow you to progress onto the degree scheme as normal.

What about specific qualifications?

There is no definitive answer to this – it depends on each course, and each candidate, but in general most archaeology admissions tutors are looking for candidates with an enthusiasm for the subject and some proof of academic ability. Beyond this an AS or A level (or equivalent) in the humanities is preferable, particularly history, geography, geology, classical civilisations or archaeology.

As archaeology can be both a science and an arts-based subject (and many universities offer both types of degree) to do a science-based archaeology degree you will normally need to have a science A level (or equivalent). For degrees where archaeology is combined with a language you will probably be expected to have an A level equivalent (or be fluent) in that language, although courses which combine archaeology and ancient Greek or Latin may teach these from scratch in the first year – but another language would be useful.

What other things can I do to improve my chances of getting a place?

Getting a place on a course is more than just your qualifications though! Just as you are more than your qualifications, so your application to university should be more than just qualifications and getting a place!

Firstly, as mentioned before, archaeology is very broad subject so reading about and taking part in archaeology can help you define what areas of archaeology really interest you. You should use the application form to show the development of your interest in archaeology. To do this you could mention how you are currently involved in archaeology.

So what should you mention? Membership of clubs related to archaeology is a good start, especially if you are or were a member of the Young Archaeologists' Club.

Any experience with archaeology that you have through volunteer excavations, pay-to-dig excavation schools or through volunteering with local groups, museums or the Portable Antiquities Scheme would be useful and if you haven't already done any of these, mention any you have

signed up for between now and the beginning of the degree you are applying for. Admission tutors know that it can be hard to find places on volunteer excavations and that these usually take place in the summer so if you are just waiting for the holidays to start before you can do some volunteering that's OK. (If you want to find out how to get involved in such activities then you should see the get involved section of our website, www.britarch.ac.uk/getinvolved)

In addition you can mention subscribing to *British Archaeology* or *Current Archaeology* magazines (and if you don't already subscribe yet, you can always start now) as these are good ways to find out about and keep up to date with archaeology within Britain. They are also excellent ways of finding out what sorts of archaeology you like – if you always skip the Roman archaeology or the Industrial archaeology articles and scan the contents page for anything Anglo-Saxon and read those first, then you know that early medieval archaeology might be your thing!

Basically, admissions tutors are far more interested in applicants who are enthusiastic and seek to expand their knowledge on their own, than they are in purely what exam results you get. You do need to show that you are academically capable, but the students who do best at university are those with a passion for the subject, and universities want to attract those students to their courses.

How do I apply for a place on a degree?

Applications to undergraduate courses are handled in the UK by UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service).

The most up-to-date and comprehensive information on the application process is provided through the UCAS website at www.ucas.com

Before you apply you will need to decide on which courses you want to apply for (you can apply for up to 5 courses via UCAS). To do this we suggest you look for courses that match your area of interest (see previous pages) and then email, phone or write to the universities who run the courses you are interested in to request a prospectus. Alternatively, many careers libraries have copies of university prospectuses and most universities have their prospectus online on their websites.

You need to consider both the course you are applying for as well as the university itself – its accommodation, clubs & societies, facilities, location etc. The Students' Union of most universities is often a good source of information.

For further information, please contact:

Council for British Archaeology, Beatrice De Cardi House, 66 Bootham, York, YO30 7BZ ,
tel 01904 671417, visit www.britarch.ac.uk or email info@britarch.ac.uk

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