

PROFESSIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES IN THE UK: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTRACTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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Throughout the history of archaeology in the UK, it has been commonplace for a wide range of individuals and organisations to carry out archaeological investigations. Archaeology has always been an 'open' practice. Except in the case of specific monuments that have statutory protection, it has not been necessary for people to have a specific archaeological authorisation or licence to be able to carry out investigations.

Against this backdrop of relatively 'open' provision of archaeological services, in the 1980s the UK Government introduced two far-reaching policies. First, central government stopped paying for 'rescue' archaeology prompted by development, requiring instead that developers should fund the archaeological work caused by their schemes on the basis of the 'polluter pays' principle. Second – in common with many other public services – archaeological services were split between regulators and providers: regulators stayed within the public sector, but providers were expected to arise from the private sector. This was accompanied by a third 1980s idea, the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering for public contracts. In combination this resulted in 'contract archaeology' whereby archaeological investigations are carried out on the basis of fixed-term contracts for specific projects. Contracts often have to be won by competitive tender. This applied to service contracts offered by Government, and to planning-related contracts offered by developers.

Remembering the 'open' character of archaeological practice, archaeological service providers in the UK are actually drawn from the public sector, the private sector and the third sector (private not-for-profit organisations). Hence archae-

ological contractors are not necessarily private companies. However, no organisation can survive in contract archaeology unless it can win sufficient projects whilst ensuring that its contracts earn more income than they cost in expenditure to complete. Consequently, all archaeological contractors are 'commercial' whether they are public, private or third sector. Balance between archaeological ethics and standards on the one hand, and commercialisation on the other, is achieved through a variety of mechanisms, including the contracts themselves, the planning/development process, and professionalism.

Marine archaeology in the UK has been exposed to the same pressures since the 1980s and shares the same balancing mechanisms. In consequence, much UK marine archaeology falls within the sphere of Rule 2(a) of the Annex, conforming to the UNESCO Convention whilst being commercial in character. In this presentation I will outline how the key balancing mechanisms operate, highlighting some of the pitfalls and 'market failures' of the UK approach, but also some of the advantages and successes.