



## Series 2 Issue 2: Report on Local Authority Historic Environment Staff Resources 2020-2022

### Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the Local Authority Staffing Surveys for 2020, 2021 and 2022, funded by Historic England and undertaken by Place Services consultancy, in association with the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers. Series 2 is a five-year series of annual surveys and annual reports to monitor capacity and capability in local authority heritage teams, covering 2020 – 2024, a period of significant central government investment via the Heritage Action Zone and High Streets Heritage Programmes.

Fieldwork conducted in October 2020, April 2021 and April 2022 surveyed historic environment specialist staffing levels in local authorities in England. Data on staffing numbers by local authority has been published separately as part of the annual Heritage Counts. This report summarises trends in staffing numbers, and presents greater detail from additional anonymised survey questions on topical issues: in 2021 relating to employment of non-UK staff in the context of the conclusion of Brexit, and in 2020 and 2022 skills needs and skills gaps to help shape support for local authority teams.

The main findings are:-

- Local authority heritage staffing is stabilising at around **two-thirds** of the staffing level of the high point in 2006, with **some evidence of increasing confidence in future growth**;
- There is significant evidence for **increasing skills gaps and recruitment problems**;
- There is awareness of **the need for climate change adaptation skills** in local authorities, particularly among conservation staff;
- Local authority teams mainly include staff who are **experienced in role**.
- There is **little evidence of a significant Brexit effect** on employee retention issues for local authority heritage teams;



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## 1. Methodology

Place Services consultancy funded by Historic England, and in partnership with ALGAO undertook fieldwork for the Local Authority Staffing Survey in April 2021 and April 2022, with reports submitted in Summer of each year. The key findings are presented in this report.

The surveys continued the use of the methodology adopted in 2020, as reported in Series 2 Issue 1<sup>1</sup>. The surveys used questions adapted from the Labour Market Intelligence Toolkit developed and published by Historic England with partners ICON and CIFA in 2019<sup>2</sup>. Use of a standardised survey methodology will make data from the Local Authority Staffing Survey more easily comparable with data gathered about other parts of the heritage sector, for example the survey of ICON members published in 2022<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Historic England (2020) [Series 2 Issue 1: Report on Local Authority Historic Environment Staff Resources 2020](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/la-staff-resources-2020/)  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/la-staff-resources-2020/>

<sup>2</sup> Historic England, CIFA, ICON (2019) [Heritage Labour Market Intelligence Toolkit](https://historicengland.org.uk/research/current/social-and-economic-research/heritage-labour-market-intelligence/)  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/current/social-and-economic-research/heritage-labour-market-intelligence/>

<sup>3</sup> ICON (2022) [Conservation Labour Market Intelligence June 2022](https://www.icon.org.uk/resource/conservation-labour-market-intelligence-june-2022.html) <https://www.icon.org.uk/resource/conservation-labour-market-intelligence-june-2022.html>



### 1.1 Staffing numbers and recruitment issues (surveyed in years 2020, 2021 and 2022)

For these parts of the survey, fieldwork used questions from Modules 1 and 2 of the Heritage Labour Market Intelligence Toolkit covering the size, employee contract status, likelihood of growth or decline, and issues with filling vacancies in heritage teams. Specialist questions commissioned by ALGAO were also included, effectively reducing the number of surveys sent to the same teams.

- a) Contact with local authorities for the 2021 survey yielded some additional survey returns relating to 2020. These adjusted figures are used in Table 2.
- b) The method for reporting staffing numbers has been altered such that assumed figures for local authorities who do not return the survey have been included based on previous year's results. This change in reporting was introduced to improve compatibility with previous surveys which used this approach<sup>4</sup>. However, as noted in Series 2 Issue 1, direct comparison of the data between Series 1 and Series 2 should be undertaken with caution.
- c) Staffing numbers data is recorded at local authority level, indexed with ONS LAD19CD codes for compatibility with other datasets. It is also indexed with both ONS RGN19CD codes for regions, and Historic England local office region names<sup>5</sup> for analysis.

### 1.2 Skills and Skills gaps issues (surveyed in 2020 and repeated in 2022)

- a) The surveys in 2020 and in 2022 included questions from Module 5 of the Heritage Labour Market Intelligence Toolkit which covers the skills of a sector workforce, skills gaps, and approaches to addressing skills gaps e.g. through continuing professional development.
- b) The responses to these questions were anonymized to encourage open responses. Data can be analyzed at regional level.
- c) Running the same survey questions in 2020 and 2022 has allowed some comparison and identification of trends, reported below.
- d) For 2022, the need for additional skills relating specifically to giving advice on climate change adaptation were added to the default list from the Heritage Labour Market Intelligence Toolkit.

### 1.3 International Workforce issues (surveyed in 2021)

- a) Questions from Module 7 of the Heritage Labour Market Intelligence Toolkit were included in the 2021 survey only.
- b) The responses to these questions were anonymized to encourage open responses. Data can be analysed at regional level.

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<sup>4</sup> Historic England (2018) [The tenth report on Local Authority Staff Resources](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/tenth-report-la-staff-resources/). <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/tenth-report-la-staff-resources/>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://historicengland.org.uk/about/contact-us/>



## 2. Surveyed organisations and survey response rate

Tailored survey questionnaires were sent each year to each organisation. Organisations in scope were: -

- Local authorities
- National Park Authorities
- Organisations providing planning advice services to local authorities

A consistent near 90% response rate has been achieved. The use of tailored survey forms, with each surveyed authority simply having to check previous years data and make changes as needed, plus budgeting for follow-up contact phone call to non-responders are key factors in reaching these high response rates.

Surveyed organisations (the sampled population) were slightly lower as instances where heritage services were provided under shared services arrangements only received one form to avoid double counting. Counts and survey responses for 2021 and 2022 are set out in Table 1, with 2020 data included for comparison.

Survey	Total number of organisations	Total number surveyed	Response rate from surveyed organisations
2020	350	350	90%
2021	354	342	89.5%
2022	354	342	90%

Table 1. Numbers of surveyed authorities and survey response rates for years 2020 to 2022

Two trends in the nature of the surveyed authorities during the surveys reported here are worth noting:-

- the increasing use of generalised rather than personal contact details for local authority teams (e.g. [planning@sampleborough.gov.uk](mailto:planning@sampleborough.gov.uk)).
- the increase in outsourcing of heritage functions to consultants or other authorities.

Together these increased the difficulty of targeting the survey and has necessitated extensive follow-up. They may also indicate an increasing pace of change in staffing and organisational structure.



### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Staffing levels 2020, 2021 and 2022

National Full-time Equivalent (FTE) data for 2021 and 2022 are given in Table 2. 2020 data, adjusted as set out in Section 1 above are included for comparison. Results for individual authorities are reported in the Heritage Counts Local Authority Indicator Data<sup>6</sup> on the Historic England website.

Staff type	Measure	Apr-2020 (adjusted)	Apr-2021	Apr-2022
LA staff Conservation	FTE	515.07	537.46	529.90
	% change	-	+4.3%	-1.5%
LA staff Archaeology	FTE	281.60	292.326	293.81
	% change	-	+3.8%	+0.5%
Total	FTE	796.67	829.786	823.71
	% change	-	+4%	-1%

Table 2. Full Time Equivalent figures for staffing of local authority conservation and archaeology teams for years 2020, 2021 and 2022

#### 3.2 Recruitment issues surveyed in years 2020 and 2022:

*Staff leaving in last 12 months:* In 2022 local authority teams were generally stable, with 68% of 224 valid responses reporting that no staff had left in the past 12 months. However, 23% had lost 1 or more FTE through staff leaving. Data for staff leaving was recorded slightly differently for the 2020 survey: 127 of 248 responses (51%) reported they had had no vacancies in the 6 month period April to October.

*Problems recruiting:* In both 2020 and 2022 local authority teams that had reported vacancies were asked if any vacancies were hard to fill. proportion of local authority teams reporting problems in recruiting has more than doubled (17% up to 37%). This supports the findings of a separate survey of job advertisements published by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Historic England (2021) Heritage Counts Local Authority Profiles [Indicator Data – Insights into the historic environment sector](https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/indicator-data/) <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/indicator-data/>

<sup>7</sup> Institute of Historic Building Conservation (2022) [Market Intelligence: Local Authority Conservation Specialists Jobs Market 2022](https://ihbc.org.uk/toolbox/research_notes/index.html) [https://ihbc.org.uk/toolbox/research\\_notes/index.html](https://ihbc.org.uk/toolbox/research_notes/index.html)



Response	2020		2022	
	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	19	17%	37	37%
No	81	71%	53	53%
Don't know	14	12%	10	10%
Total reporting vacancies	114		100	

Table 3. Count and percentages of surveyed organisations reporting problems with recruiting.

Where recruitment problems were reported, local authorities were asked to choose the likely causes from a list. The most frequently cited cause in both 2020 and 2022 was ‘Low number of applicants with the required skills’ (79% in 2020, 89% in 2022).

*Likelihood to change in size:* Local authorities were asked in 2020 and 2022 to assess the likelihood of their team increasing in size, decreasing, or remaining stable over the coming year. In both years nearly two thirds (64%) expected to remain the same. In 2022 there was a noticeable rise in the number considering it likely or very likely to increase (combined scores up from 12% to 18%).

Response	2020		2022	
	Count	%	Count	%
Very likely to increase	9	4%	12	5%
Likely to increase	20	8%	29	13%
Likely to remain the same	158	64%	143	64%
Likely to decrease	15	6%	9	4%
Very likely to decrease	4	2%	4	2%
Don't know	41	17%	26	12%
Prefer not to say	1	0%	2	1%
Total valid responses	248		223	

Table 4. Expectation for teams to grow or contract in 2020 and 2022

### 3.3 Skills and skills gaps issues – years 2020 and 2022

248 responses to these questions were received in 2020 (70% of surveyed organisations), and 217 in 2022 (63%). The respondents identities were anonymised to encourage open responses.

*Generic skills:* The surveys in 2020 and 2022 asked local authority teams to select the generic skills required for their roles from a long list. In both years the most frequently cited skills remained broadly the same. These were: -



- Communication
- Digital skills
- Project Management
- Audience engagement, Advocacy and Outreach
- Leadership
- Project development

*Specialist skills:* similarly, teams were asked to choose the specialist skills needed for their roles from a long list. Again, the list of most frequently selected skills remained the same across both surveys:

- Buildings History
- Heritage Protection (legislation, policy, designation guidelines)
- Assessing the significance of heritage assets
- Development Management
- Conservation Philosophy

*Climate change adaptation skills:* In 2022 three additional skills were added to the list of specialist skills covering climate change related work. All three were selected by significant percentages of local authorities responding, though none of these skills were in the top 5 most frequently cited, listed above. Conservation teams were more likely to include these skills in their lists, though the significance of this is not clear.

Skill description	%
Advising on adaptation or retrofit of buildings to improve energy efficiency	66%
Assessing a place/asset/buildings ability to cope with future climate change impacts	53%
Advising on change to archaeological sites or landscapes affected by climate change or climate change mitigation measures	33%

Table 5. Percentages of survey respondents including the three climate change adaptation skill areas in their specialist skills list.

*Skills gaps:* A skills gap occurs when an employer considers that a team lacks the skills, knowledge, experience or qualifications to be fully proficient at their job. This could be through staff turnover, or a change in team role (e.g. to take on new responsibilities). The 2020 and 2022 surveys asked local authority teams if they considered if their team had skills gaps. In 2020 16% of teams agreed. This had risen to 21% in 2022.

*Approaches to addressing skills gaps:* Respondents were asked to pick multiple options from a list of approaches to address skills gaps. The approaches chosen in the 2020 and 2022 surveys are summarized in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 . Training remains the most popular approach, rising slightly in the 2022 results which introduced a split between internally and externally sourced training. Externally sourced training is significantly preferred. Using recruitment or bringing in contractors to address skills gaps have both increased (though note the problems in recruitment reported at 3.2 above). A fall in the numbers reporting *Not doing anything specific* from 17% to 10% suggests a growing awareness of the issue of skills gaps.



Approach	Count of responses including this option	%
Training staff	156	52%
Recruiting new staff	16	5%
Using contractors	20	7%
Encouraging secondments	10	3%
Not doing anything specific to develop skills	52	17%
Other / Prefer not to say / Don't know / No response	46	15%
Total number of all options chosen by all responses	300	

Table 6.1 Approaches to addressing skills gaps: 2020 responses

Approach	Count of responses including this option	%
Training staff on in-house courses	90	24%
Training staff on external courses	152	41%
Recruiting new staff	27	7% (up 2%)
Using contractors	29	8% (up 1%)
Encouraging secondments	6	2% (down 1%)
Not doing anything specific to develop skills	28	7% (down 10%)
Other / Prefer not to say / Don't know / No response	43	11% (down 4%)
Total number of all options chosen by all responses	375	

Table 6.2 Approaches to addressing skills gaps: 2022 responses

*Staff length in service 2022:* An experimental statistic was collected in 2022 to attempt to gauge the experience available in local authority teams. All respondents were asked to state the length in service of the *longest* serving member of their team. Responses are given in Table 7.

Response	Count of responses	%
Less than 1 year	8	3%
1-3 years	29	9%
4-10 years	52	17%
More than 10 years	126	40%
Don't know / prefer not to say	7	2%
No response	87	28%

Table 7. Length of service of the longest serving member of teams

### 3.4 International Workforce surveyed in 2021

The intention in including questions about the origin of staff was to assess the level of dependency of local authority teams on non-UK (in particular EU) staff. The context was the conclusion of the Brexit transitional arrangements on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, and the possible risks to workforce sustainability. 243 anonymised responses were received.





1. To the question: *How many of your organisation's building conservation and/or archaeology workforce were non UK-passport holders or are based outside the UK, as at 1st April 2021?* 8.2% of local authorities answered either '1-2' (19 responses) 'or '5+' (1 response). Extrapolating from this result suggests around 33.5 or about 4.4% of the total local authority workforce are non-UK citizens<sup>8</sup>.
2. To the question: *What is the likelihood of your organisation increasing or decreasing its building conservation and/or archaeology workforce that are non UK-passport holders or are based outside the UK, over the coming year?* 1.2% answered 'Very Likely to Decrease' and 0.8% answered either 'Likely to Increase' or 'Very Likely to increase'
3. To the question: *Overall, how dependent would you say your building conservation and/or archaeology workforce is on non-UK workers?* 3.7% answered either 'Dependent' or 'Highly dependent'
4. To the question: *Do your building conservation and/or archaeology team(s) currently have any recruitment or retention challenges regarding non-UK workers?* 1.2% answered 'Yes'.

Though of great consequence to the individuals concerned, the 2021 survey suggests that the risk to the local authority heritage workforce arising *specifically* from post-Brexit loss of EU staff is small.

#### 4. Accessing Local Authority Staffing Survey data

The full survey datasets from the annual Local Authority Staffing Survey along with full text of survey questionnaires, and technical reports on survey completion is available for research use. Please contact [customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk), requesting data from the Local Authority Staffing Survey project (project ref 8006).

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<sup>8</sup> This broadly matches the results of the CEBR 2019 [Skills gap/needs in the Heritage Sector: A report for Historic England](https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2019/skill-gaps-needs-in-the-heritage-sector-pdf/) which identified around 4% of public sector staff in heritage are from the EU.  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2019/skill-gaps-needs-in-the-heritage-sector-pdf/>