



Series 2 Issue 3: Report on Local Authority Historic Environment Staff Resources 2023

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the Local Authority Staffing Survey for 2023, funded by Historic England and undertaken by Essex County Council Place Services, in partnership with the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO). Series 2 is a five-year series of annual surveys 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 between April – June 2023 surveyed historic environment specialist staffing levels in local authorities in England. It also gathered building conservation staff insights on the volume of casework involving energy efficiency retrofit, confidence in decision making and views on current advice and guidance.

The main findings are:

- As of 1st April 2023, there were around 807 FTE staff working on heritage issues in local authorities in England (528 FTE in conservation roles and 280 in archaeology roles.) This is a small decrease of 2% from 2022, or -16.18 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts, driven mainly by a reduction in archaeology staff (a decrease of 13.92 FTE posts).
- A relatively small proportion of respondents (13%) said that between 50-100% of their team can be classed as ‘early career’, compared to 32% who said that most (between three quarters to 100%) of their team were late career. This highlights a need to mitigate against the impact of future retirement on capacity and skills.
- Staff are seeing more case work involving decisions, advice or pre-application enquiries about retrofit. 59% of responding local authorities said that this had increased over the last year, just under a quarter of whom (22%) said they had ‘increased a lot’.
- There is a need for additional information and guidance to support local authority staff advising and making decisions on retrofit. Only 16% of respondents said their staff were ‘very confident’ in this area.

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1. Methodology

1.1 Fieldwork

Historic England commissioned Essex County Council Places Services Team to conduct a survey of historic environment specialist staffing levels in local authorities in England. Data was collected via an online survey (with a telephone chase of non-responding authorities) between April – June 2023. Details of the survey sample and response rate are provided in section 1.3 below.

The questionnaire included the following sections:

- Questions to gather statistics on the number of staff employed by local authorities in building conservation and archaeology roles (with a reference date of 1st April 2023), adapted from Module 2 of the [Heritage Labour Market Intelligence Toolkit](#).
- Questions commissioned by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) for ALGAO members, covering service level agreements, outsourcing arrangements, and membership of professional associations.
- A series of questions gathering building conservation staff views on the volume of casework involving energy efficiency retrofit¹, confidence in decision making and views on current advice and guidance.

The full survey questionnaire can be found in the technical report.

1.2 Analysis and reporting

This report summarises trends in staffing numbers and presents greater detail from additional anonymised survey questions on the topic of retrofit decision making.

Staffing 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

¹ Retrofit was defined in the questionnaire as ‘the process of improving the energy and environmental performance of buildings through technical changes.’



England local office region names² for analysis. The full dataset for individual local authorities can be accessed [here](#) and are also regularly published as part of Heritage Counts, Heritage Indicators on the Historic England website. Assumed figures for non-responding local authorities are included based on previous year’s results.

The responses to additional questions on the topic of retrofit were anonymised to encourage open responses. Essex Place Services provided Historic England with the anonymised dataset and data tables. Responses to open text questions were then coded to identify key themes for analysis.

1.3 Survey sample and response rate

The overall sample for the 2023 survey included a total of 354³ organisations in England, comprised of:

- All 333 local authorities in England
- All 10 national park authorities in England
- Eleven ALGAO members not included in the above categories, primarily local authority-owned or affiliated heritage organisations providing archaeological services to councils (e.g. shared services, heritage trusts)

Counts and survey responses for 2023 are set out in Table 1, with 2020-22 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%
2023	354	258	79%

Table 1. Numbers of surveyed authorities and survey response rates for years 2020 to 2023

The response rate for the 2023 staff survey was lower than has been achieved in previous years, despite the continued use of tailored survey forms and follow-up contact phone calls. Further details can be found in the technical report.

Respondents who declared they had building conservation staff within their organisation were invited to complete an additional set of questions on retrofit. These questions received a total of 189 responses.

2. Results

² See <https://historicengland.org.uk/about/contact-us/>

³ Twelve instances of two authorities having a shared service meant that 12 authorities were removed from the sample to avoid collecting duplicate responses, meaning that the survey actively sought responses from a total of 342 authorities to cover all 354 organisations above.



2.1 Staffing levels for 2023

National Full-time Equivalent (FTE) data for 2023 is shown below in Table 2, alongside data from 2020, 2021 and 2022 for comparison purposes.

Overall, in 2023 there were around 807 FTE staff working on heritage issues in local authorities (528 FTE in conservation roles and 280 in archaeology roles.)

Estimates based on the 2023 data indicate that staffing numbers declined since 2022, albeit a small decrease of 2%, or -16.18 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts, driven mainly by a reduction in archaeology staff (a decrease of 13.92 FTE posts.)⁴

Staff type	Measure	Apr-2020 (adjusted)	Apr-2021	Apr-2022	Apr-2023
LA staff Conservation	FTE	515.07	537.46	529.90	527.64
	% change	-	+4.3%	-1.5%	-0.4%
LA staff Archaeology	FTE	281.60	292.326	293.81	279.89
	% change	-	+3.8%	+0.5%	-4.7%
Total	FTE	796.67	829.786	823.71	807.53
	% change	-	+4%	-1%	-2%

Table 2. Full Time Equivalent figures for staffing of local authority conservation and archaeology teams for years 2020-2023

At this stage it is not possible to robustly comment on long term staffing trends as some year on year volatility is to be expected, but early indications suggest declining local authority historic environment employment since 2021. We note, however, that between 2020 and 2021 there was a 4% increase in staffing levels – likely driven by return to work following Covid restrictions. So staffing levels in 2023 remain above 2020 estimates. Because of a survey method change, it is not possible to compare staff numbers pre-2020 in the pre-Covid period. However, the previous Local Authority Staff Survey (known as Series 1) found that between 2006 and 2018 the number of conservation specialists fell by 35% (283.4FTE). The number of archaeological specialists advising local authorities in England also fell by 35% (142.5 FTE). This trend is illustrated below in Figure 1.

Tables 3 (conservation) and 4 (archaeology) show how staffing figures were calculated for 2022 and 2023.

⁴ It should be noted that response from ALGAO members was notably lower in 2023 compared with 2022, with 11 ALGAO members (plus two non-members with archaeology staff in 2022) not responding to the 2023 survey



<i>FTE figures as of 1st April</i>		Apr-22	Apr-23
A	Conservation staffing from LAs responding to the survey	461.62	416.15**
B	Estimate for non-responding LAs based on carrying forward the latest available figures (from either 2020/2021/2022)	68.28	111.49
C	Total estimate (A+B)	529.90	527.64

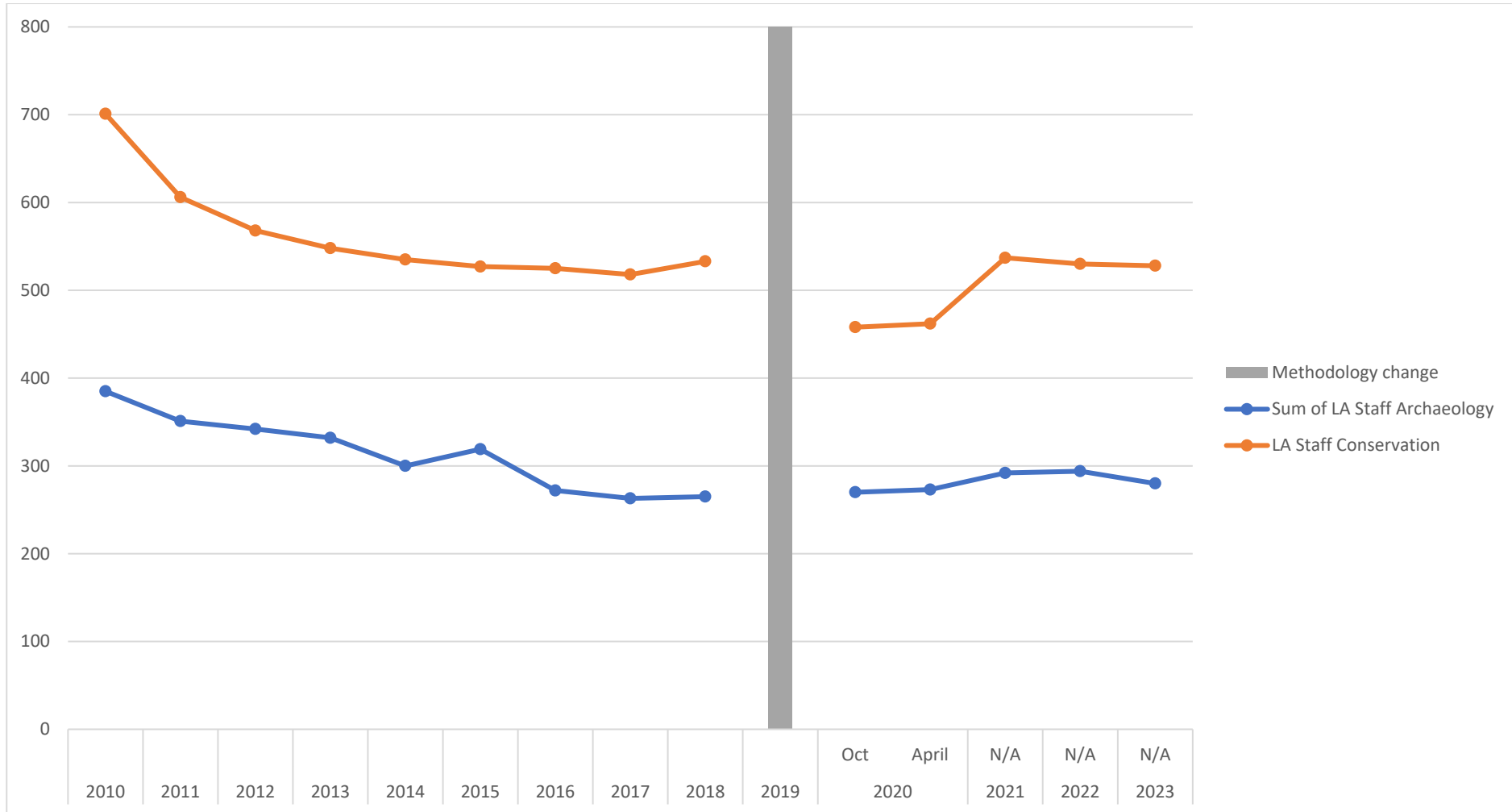
Table 3. Conservation staff FTE 2022 and 2023

<i>FTE figures as of 1st April</i>		Apr-22	Apr-23
A	Archaeology staffing from LAs responding to the survey	253.65	238.09
B	Estimate for non-responding LAs based on carrying forward the latest available figures (from either 2021/2022)	40.16	41.8
C	Total estimate (A+B)	293.81	279.89

Table 4. Archaeology staff FTE 2022 and 2023

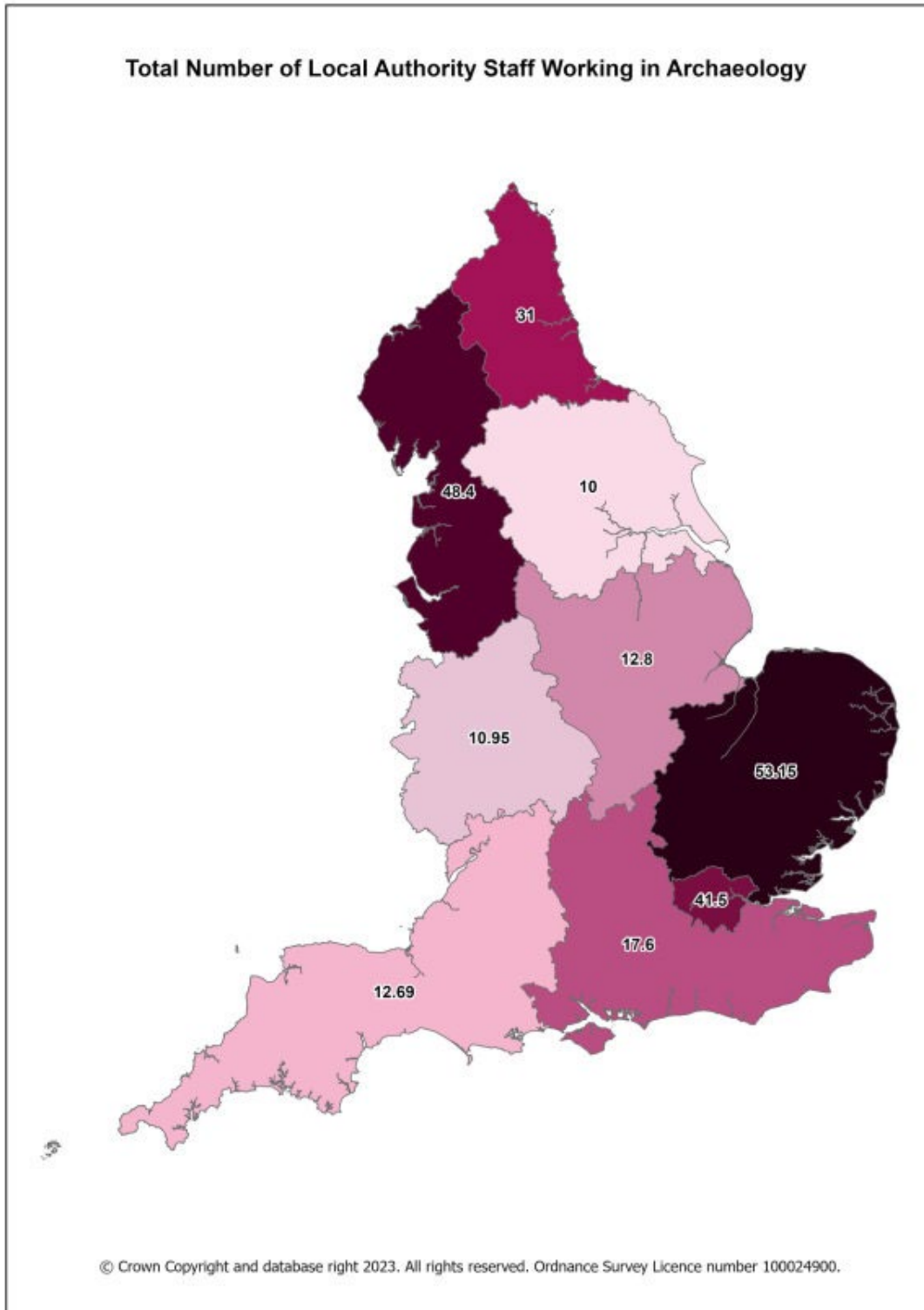
Figures 2 and 3 show the 2023 figures from column A by region.

1 Chart showing changes in LA staffing using Series 1 (pre-2019) and Series 2 data



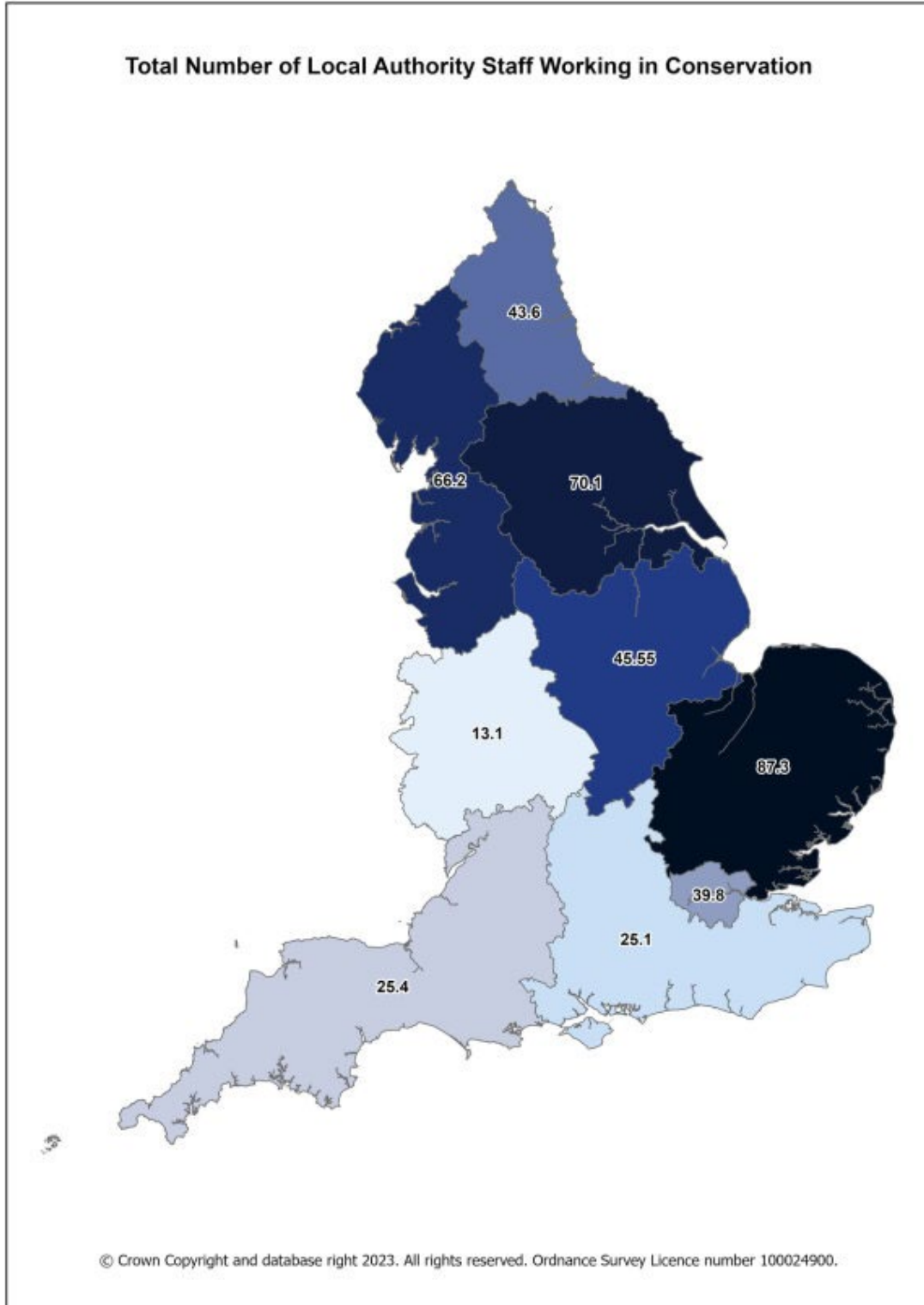


2 Archaeology staffing from LAs responding to the survey (FTE staff)





3 Conservation staffing from LAs responding to the survey (FTE staff)



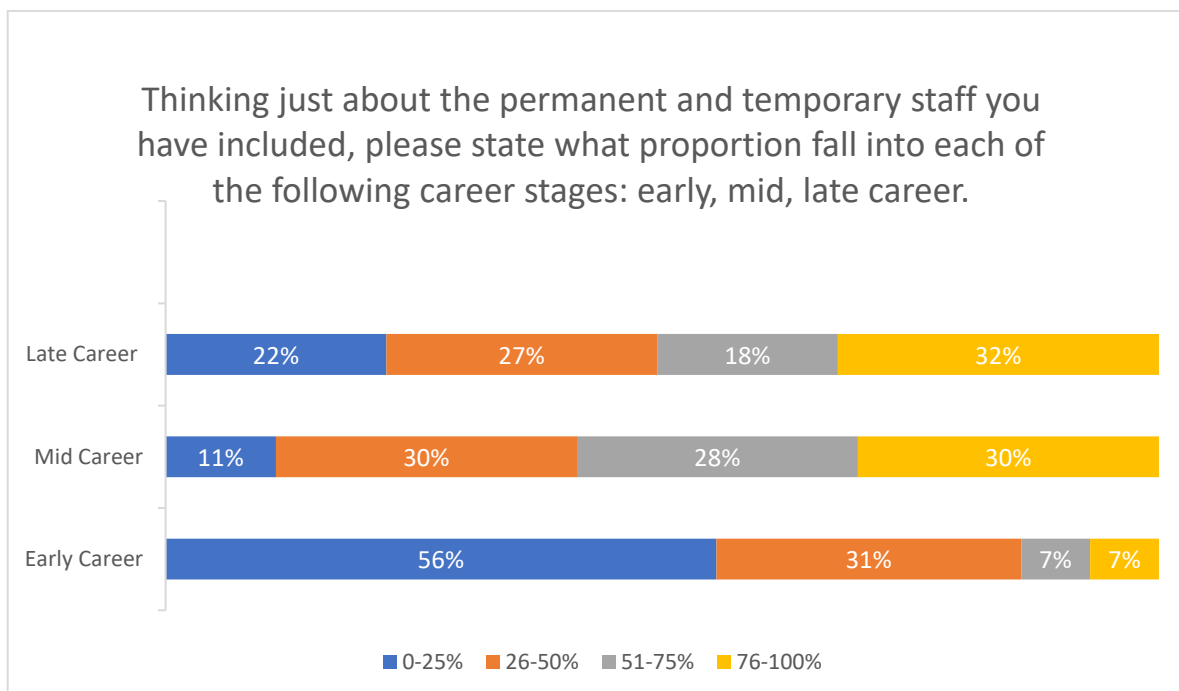
2.2 Career stage

In 2023, in response to concerns about an ageing workforce and the potential impact on skills deficits, respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of their staff they consider as early, mid and late career.

The results show that early career staff do not tend to comprise a large proportion of local authority historic environment teams. Only a small proportion of respondents (13%) said that between 50-100% of their team can be classed as ‘early career’.

In comparison, the proportion of respondents who said that most (between three quarters to 100%) of their team were mid or late career was higher (30% and 32% respectively).

For those local authorities more reliant on experienced staff later in their career, this highlights the need to mitigate against the impact of future retirement on capacity and skills.



2.3 Retrofit

Local authorities with building conservation staff within their organisation were invited to complete further questions on the topic of improving the energy efficiency of historic buildings.

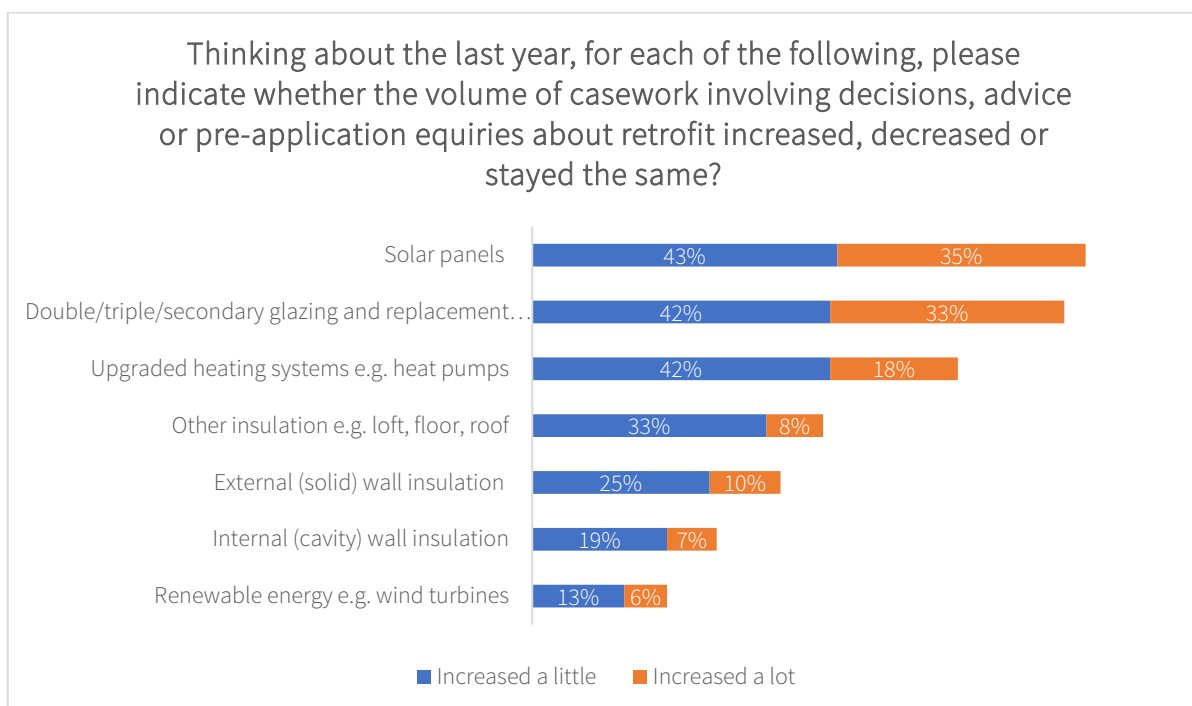
Due to the scale of the climate crisis and the UK’s commitment to reach net zero, climate change work is becoming increasingly important with knock-on effects across many sectors. In the heritage

sector we are seeing a growth in demand for climate change specialist skills within local authorities, who bear a great deal of responsibility for heritage conservation. According to the 2022 Local Authority Staffing Survey 66% of respondents selected “advising on adaptation or retrofit of buildings to improve energy efficiency” as one of the specialist skills needed for their roles.

Volume of casework

Respondents were asked about the volume of energy efficiency improvement casework in their local authority over the last year. The results indicate an upward trend.

- 59% said that the volume of casework involving decisions, advice or pre-application enquiries about retrofit had increased over the last year, 22% of whom said they had ‘increased a lot’. Around a quarter (21%) said it remained the same.
- When asked the same question in relation to specific measures, respondents said that solar panels (78%) and double/triple/secondary glazing (75%) had seen the largest increase in casework.



Confidence

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is ‘not at all confident’ and 5 is ‘very confident’, a high proportion of respondents (88%) selected ‘3’ or above, but only 16% said their staff were very confident.

Further insights into specific areas of low confidence could help to identify key areas where further support and training is needed.



1 (Not at all confident)	2	3	4	5 (Very confident)
-	5%	23%	49%	16%

Advice and guidance

Over half (56%) of respondents agreed that staff have access to the right guidance and technical advice when making decisions or advising on plans or projects that include retrofit. There is, however, some uncertainty, with 28% selecting ‘neither agree nor disagree’, whilst 11% disagreed and 5% did not know.

Responding local authorities shared their views on how resources available to them could be made better, to help them advise and make decisions. The most frequently cited suggested improvements centered on three key areas. The following is based on coding of open text responses. Verbatim responses are also included to provide examples. A breakdown of responses with counts are shown in Table 5.

i) Content

Staff would like clear and detailed information on the implementation of specific energy efficiency measures that covers their impacts and offers some direction to support decision making.

Advice on particular types of insulation, i.e what is breathable and therefore appropriate. More information about how IWI and EWI impacts the architectural details would be helpful, so we have documents that we can present to contractors etc as an explanation.

(London/South East, Archaeology)

Some unequivocal tech spec information. e.g. Product X will lead to moisture retention in masonry so can be refused. I realise that is difficult as it would mean actively opposing products that have BBA approval so are in the Building Regs framework.

(North East/Yorkshire, Mixed)

Historic England publishes a range of advice and guidance for professionals and owners/occupiers of historic buildings, see here.



ii) *Type/format*

Staff value case studies that illustrate ‘real world’ practical examples alongside theoretical information.

Case studies needed and best practice examples need to be on a website/weblinks with technical info freely available

(South West, Mixed)

Case study examples of good practice/approaches for assessing works affecting different types of properties of varying grades, age and construction materials.

(North West, Archaeology)

Case studies are available on Historic England’s website. For example, see Air Source Heat Pump Case Studies [here](#).

Sharing of guidance

Staff need regularly updated guidance that reflects the fast-paced nature of technological changes in this area.

More specific good practice guidance from Historic England regarding common retrofit upgrades would be really useful for LPA staff, both in terms of guiding decision making but also in terms of pointing applicants in the right direction. There should be in the form of a series of guidance webpages, which could be regularly updated in line with changes to the products on offer and our understanding of them in the conservation sector

(East of England, Archaeology)

HE's online guidance is fairly comprehensive but its publications could possibly do with being updated since microgeneration technologies move so fast (some publications are from 2018 or earlier).

(London/South East, Archaeology)

Currently open for [consultation](#), the new Historic England Advice Note (HEAN) covers Climate Change and Historic Building Adaptation. It aims to provide advice to local planning authorities, and others involved in the planning process, on:



- The need for planning permissions and/or other consents for some of the common changes required to decarbonise and improve the energy efficiency of historic buildings.
- Determining proposals to decarbonise and improve the energy efficiency of historic buildings to enable positive climate action.
- How local plans and other planning mechanisms can deliver a positive strategy for historic buildings that proactively supports climate action.

The final version will be supported by a series of online case studies and training for local authorities.

Other suggestions for improvements included the following:

- Increased consistency and standardisation from the ‘top down’

A standard approach to retrofit, instead of the current situation where it is left up to individual LPAs to interpret the guidance. Cross-border decision making is wildly different between different districts.

(Midlands, Archaeology)

I feel there is a fairly inconsistent approach to retrofitting across the country. As such it would be good to have some concise guidance that is rolled out nationally to ensure consistent decision making is made.

(London & South East, Archaeology)

- Improving access to advice and guidance by collating existing resources in a single central location – this often went hand in hand with ensuring what is available is up to date.
- Better targeting of advice and guidance, for example, simple guides for homeowners/applicants to equip them with a better understanding
- Information should be tailored to reflect different types of buildings

Information suited to the full range of built form and tradition. One size definitely does not fit all. The occupants of model colliery villages with poor insulation require different methods than the owners of a thatched GII listed cottage.

Midlands, Mixed

- Guidance should acknowledge that decision making in this area involves tensions between climate policy, building regulations and heritage significance

Lack of policy/guidance on balance between climate change/energy conservation and preservation of significance of heritage assets.



(North East/Yorkshire, Archaeology)

What improvements, if any, could be made to the guidance and technical advice currently available to building conservation staff around retrofit?	
Responses	Count
Include detail on specific measures (technical information, pros and cons, impacts)	17
Include case studies and worked examples	16
Keep regularly updated so that it is responsive to ongoing changes and the introduction of new technologies	12
More consistent/standardised	12
Create a free, central location for storing guidance to improve access	9
Better targeted e.g. at homeowners/applicants, public, building surveyors	7
Ensure information is tailored to accommodate different built forms/materials/ages	5
More acknowledgement of tensions in decision making (e.g. between heritage/building regs/climate change)	5
Courses/seminars/lectures	4
Other	5
Don't know	1
Valid responses	76
Not answered	141

Table 5. Suggested improvements – count of responses