

What Next? Opportunities for Progression

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The most inspiring aspect of the WEA Archaeology Project has been the sense of excitement and passion the subject has inspired in learners. One example of this was a mini-project which was organised in Sheffield to provide opportunities for participants to work together in the field. In the middle of what was a harsh and bitter winter, over 50 participants came to the WEA's Sheffield Learning Centre at Attercliffe in the east end of the city – a former vicarage built on the site of an earlier parsonage – to survey, map, and dig test pits. Though this was hardly the most interesting of sites, yielding only a few silver sixpences and the odd fragment of 19th century pottery among the slag and clinker, it was clear that many had been bitten by the bug. As an educational subject, archaeology is evidently an end in itself.

An added attraction of the subject, in terms of widening participation generally, is that it offers opportunities to develop a wide range of transferable skills. As indicated above (Implementing Learning Support), skills in literacy, numeracy and communication can be enhanced and built on within the context of archaeology, boosting learners' confidence and developing a sense of achievement. For learners who may not be at a stage where they are willing to engage in explicit Skills for Life programmes, this approach provides an effective, non-threatening opportunity to develop confidence in core skills without the potential barriers of formal assessment.

Having participated in practical archaeology programmes of the kind described in this pack, therefore, what opportunities are there for progression? As is the case with many WEA students, the request will often be 'more of the same'. Lifelong learning is not necessarily about linear development, in which people move from the simple to the complex; broadening understanding and skills, investigating different themes within a subject area, or exploring a related subject are equally valid progressions. Within the context of the Project, learners have taken both routes. One participant has accessed an 'A' Level Archaeology course delivered at a local sixth form college. Others progressed within the provision of the Project itself, moving from introductory classroom-based programmes to field work, or from introductory courses to more independent study. For some of the more advanced learners, the Attercliffe work referred to above enabled them to develop their own materials in relation to investigating a site. Outside of structured education, there is a range of local archaeological societies and organisations as well as statutory services providing information about how to get involved in archaeology activity locally. Some of these are listed in the next section.

Equally, the skills and confidence engendered by involvement in practical archaeology offer possibilities to progress onto literacy and numeracy courses offered by the WEA and other organisations. As a result of the experience of the Project it is hoped that the WEA will be able to develop some literacy and numeracy assessment tools within an archaeology context, so that learners interested in building on their educational skills can do so within a familiar subject setting.

Touching the earth

An archaeology teaching resource pack for WEA tutors