

## Getting Answers

### Getting Answers: promotion and application of the research agenda

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*This paper reviews the uses to which the Research Framework has been put since it was developed, comparing the experience with England and Scotland, and then considers alternative options for the future. It is based on the outline presentation at the CIFA conference, Bangor University, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2016, and the responses from the audience.*

#### Intended uses

When the first printed version of the Research Framework was produced in 2008 it outlined how it expected to be used:

“During the next few years, it is hoped that it will help archaeologists and organisations in Wales to:

- appreciate the broader context or work that has been done already;
- consider the needs and opportunities for new research;
- identify collaborators and stakeholders;
- seek funding;
- promote training;
- prioritise the use of resources;
- develop future research frameworks.”  
(<http://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/used.html>)

The 2016 conference was an opportune moment to look back at these intentions and to review whether they had been borne out in practice.

#### Development of the Framework

The process in Wales started with the IFA Wales/Cymru group arranging a conference in Aberystwyth in 2001. Contributions were invited from individuals active in the area (in practice these were drawn mainly from RCAHMW and the WATs). Alongside the papers on organisations and structures, there were regional and thematic papers. These were

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selective and idiosyncratic, with each author choosing which work to refer to and which topics to highlight. (The proceedings of the conference were published as a BAR in 2003, edited by Stephen Briggs.)

Following the conference, Cadw decided to support the WATs to flesh out a full research framework by creating regional resource audits which summarised the known resource for each period/theme as reflected in the SMR/HERs (counts by monument type and distribution maps), identified key sites and radiocarbon evidence.<sup>1</sup> These regional period summaries were presented at a series of public forums to which contractors, curators, academics and volunteers were invited, leading to the identification of strengths, weaknesses and current issues.

For each period/theme, a working group was convened comprising relevant specialists from across the archaeological community to bring the four regional papers together and to finalise a draft of a pan-Wales document. These documents were presented at a seminar in Aberystwyth in 2004, and following revisions in the light of the discussions there, they were finalised and posted on the website as Themes.<sup>2</sup>

In 2008 the booklet *Introducing a Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales* was published; it was launched at the IFA Archaeology in Britain conference in Swansea.

It was recognised that there would be a need to periodically review and update the documents to reflect advances in knowledge and new opportunities, and in 2009-2010 the committees revised the themes, presenting the results at the 2010 IFA Conference in Bangor and finalising the First Review documents in 2011. At this point the committee overseeing the development of the Framework was formalised, having previously been an informal subgroup under the auspices of IFA Wales/Cymru Group committee.

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<sup>1</sup> The key sites, radiocarbon dates and bibliography for each region are presented on the Research Framework website under Documents/Original documents. The full reports are not available online apart from NE Wales (<http://www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/research/contents.htm>).

<sup>2</sup> The website included a forum to host discussion but was found that people were unwilling to engage in this medium, and the forum was therefore closed down when the website was upgraded.

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The papers were revised again in 2014 and then a new set of drafts was prepared in the run-up to the 2016 conference.

Apart from the initial phase of the resource audit and contributions from organisations towards conference, website and publication costs, all this work was undertaken without payment. Due to changes in roles and other commitments, the theme working parties and lead authors changed over time.

### **Research Frameworks in England**

In England the research framework exercise has been driven by English Heritage since the 1990s, and is now being taken forward by Historic England (Historic England 2016). Its purpose was defined explicitly as 'primarily to guide archaeological investigations by contractors, consultants and local government curators/planning officers' (Pye Tait 2014: 8). The documents have been prepared over the last 15 years and include regional, thematic and chronological summaries. They were prepared by committees of experts (mainly drawn from contractors and curators), with some open forum events. In 2014 EH commissioned an evaluation of the quality and usefulness of the research frameworks and concluded that although individual documents had proved useful, users found them inconsistent and hard to use (Pye Tait 2014 2-5).

### **The Research Framework in Scotland**

Scotland's Research Framework process was initiated in 2008 by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland with funding from Historic Scotland (ScARF 2016). Period and thematic committees drafted papers which were then presented at seminars and opened to comment on the website. The papers were finalised in 2012 and are in the process of refreshing, with the addition of a museums and collections dimension. The main outputs have been high-level narratives intended to inform academic and other research.

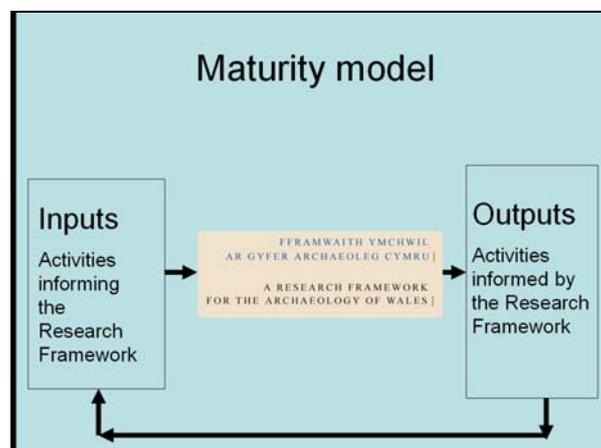
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### A maturity model for Research Frameworks

In order to determine the extent to which a research framework has become embedded in professional practice, it is necessary to draw out the uses to which it would be put once the process has achieved maturity. Broadly, we would recognise its role as inputs (information and insights feeding into the framework) and outputs (elements of practice drawing on the framework), which would combine to create a cycle of continuous development.

Inputs cover evidence from primary data collection (fieldwork, and artefact and ecofact identification), analysis and synthesis, innovations in methodology to address specific topics, theoretical framing, and new articulations of ethics and standards. Outputs cover practice in data collection, project scoping and research questions, determination of significance and value for conservation decision-making, funding decisions and prioritisation, public engagement, CPD and training, and collaboration.

Even if a framework has reached maturity, there will always remain a role for the rescue/salvage response in the face of potential loss.



### The Welsh experience

At the final session of the 2016 conference, a straw poll was taken among those present to assess the extent to which the research framework for Wales had reached maturity. Approximately 31 people were in the audience. For each prompt, the number of people agreeing was tallied,

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and then some examples were proposed. The results give a snapshot of current practice.

**Table 1: Affiliation and roles of attendees**

CIfA member	16
CBA member	19
IHBC member	1
Civic Trust	1
Institute of Project Management	1
Curatorial/ government	17
Contractors/fieldwork	8
Academic	3
Amateurs/volunteers	2
Third sector (non-WAT)	1

### **Have you visited the research framework website in the last 12 months other than for the conference?**

Eighteen people said yes, for grant applications, research, to support and justify work for new sites in area, to assist in determining significance of threatened sites, as part of developer-funded scoping, framing a PhD proposal.

### **How many used particular method or approach because of research framework?**

Three people said yes. This sparked a discussion on the qualitative and quantitative basis of the research framework and the extent to which changes were transparent. It was confirmed that the current review documents did not draw on systematic analysis of HER data.

### **Have you used the research framework to scope projects?**

Nine people said yes, particularly in applications for research funding. Some reported a frustration that the Research Framework for Wales was often ignored in UK-wide funding and research.

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### **Have you used the framework in making management and conservation decisions?**

Three people said yes. There was discussion about whether this was appropriate to apply to individual cases, with most feeling not.

### **Have you found partners and collaborators through the framework?**

Nobody said yes. The discussion considered whether a simple directory, list of current and proposed projects, or a forum might facilitate this but it was unclear whether this was a clear need.

### **Have you used the framework in seeking or allocating funding?**

Nine people said yes. Those involved in allocating funding said it was a core criterion.

### **Have you used the research framework as part of your professional development?**

Four people said yes.

### **Is it helpful to have a physical booklet for the Framework rather than just a website?**

Ten people said yes.

## **Next steps**

The steering committee will have to consider how to complete this cycle of review, and in particular to decide whether to finalise the papers using the current period-based structure, whether to seek to generate quantitative data comparable to the original resource audit of the HERs, whether to enhance the website to facilitate discussion and collaboration, how to promote the Framework particularly outside the profession in Wales, and whether to produce a print version.

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<https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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SCARF 2016 *Scottish Archaeological Research Framework website*  
<http://www.scottishheritagehub.com/>.