



By degrees

Benchmarking archaeology degrees in
Australian universities

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Contents

Preface	v
Executive summary	v
What this booklet is about	1
What is benchmarking?	1
Benchmark statements.....	2
Subject knowledge and understanding	2
Archaeology-specific skills.....	3
Generic skills	4
What is archaeology?	5
Australian archaeology	5
Why is archaeology important?.....	6
Archaeology in Australian universities	6
The Honours degree	7
Standards.....	7
Developing the teaching and learning environment	8
Where can graduates expect employment?	9
Cultural heritage management	10
Academic teaching and research	10
Museums and art galleries	10
And in general	11
References.....	11
Appendix 1	12
Benchmarking Workshop, University of Melbourne, 16-17 August, 2007	12
Appendix 2	14
Professional associations represented in the Benchmarking Project	14
Appendix 3	15
The Benchmarking Archaeology Degrees Project: Key groups	15



Preface

The benchmark statements in this document were drafted by a representative working group of all the university providers of archaeology education in Australia. Attendees of the workshop in which the statements were considered and articulated are listed in Appendix 1. Contributions to specific sections of the introductory and concluding statements were written by Jane Balme, John Campbell, Catherine Clarke, Sarah Colley, Iain Davidson, Andrew Fairbairn, Stephen Nichols and Sean Ulm and edited by Wendy Beck.

This document is one outcome of a project, 'Benchmarking Archaeology Degrees in Australian Universities', which aims to establish and develop mutually agreed standards for Honours degrees in archaeology in Australian universities. Support for this project has been provided by the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. The project Grant Holder is Wendy Beck. Catherine Clarke is the Project Officer.

In developing these Australian benchmarks, the working group gratefully acknowledges the previous work of colleagues in the United Kingdom who developed the *Subject Benchmark Statement: Archaeology*, published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in 2000 and (revised) in 2007.

We also thank the Australian National Committee for Archaeology Teaching and Learning, a subcommittee of the Australian Archaeological Association, Inc., for their ongoing contribution and support.

Executive summary

Long-term history underpins all societies and is fundamental to cultural identity and nation-building. Through archaeology we understand Australia's unique 50,000 years of human history. As well, archaeology contributes to global heritage conservation and forensic studies. In order to maintain the high standard of specialised university education in this area, a subject benchmark, setting out shared understandings of learning outcomes for graduates, has been developed.

The benchmark contained in this document was drafted by a group representing all university providers of specialised archaeology education in Australia, and refined by consultation amongst the broader profession. It focuses on the four-year Honours degree in archaeology because this is considered to be the minimum preparation for both professional archaeologists and higher degree study. The benchmark defines the range of knowledge, skills and understandings Honours graduates in archaeology can be expected to possess, and outlines potential employment areas.



The archaeology benchmark forms a nationally-agreed education standard which is widely and publicly disseminated. As archaeology is a discipline which crosses the traditional Humanities/Science divide it has a greater breadth and diversity than other professional disciplines. It uses a wide range of methods which apply to the study of all people in all regions, from all time periods, and includes historical, maritime, classical and Indigenous subfields. An easily-accessed benchmark results in better informed university archaeology teachers, students, prospective students, and employers of graduates.

A benchmark is required now. It is an important foundation for building better archaeology education and research programs in Australia, currently and into the future.

Wendy Beck

Project team leader



What this booklet is about

This document sets out for the first time national benchmarks for the discipline in Australian universities. A shared network of understanding within the discipline of archaeology, which sets out the nature and level of student learning outcomes, is essential for developing common expectations of graduates, both nationally and internationally. The standards and broad learning outcomes were drafted by a working group representing archaeology education providers in Australia, many of whom are linked to key professional associations, as listed in Appendices 1 and 2.

What is benchmarking?

The process of 'benchmarking' involves the academic disciplinary community, through dialogue and consensus, drawing up a set of general expectations about standards and about the expected nature and range of student learning outcomes from archaeology degrees in Australia. The national benchmarks focus on the four-year degree program – usually a three-year Bachelor degree, with a fourth year for Honours – because this is regarded as the fundamental level of achievement required for entry to the profession and higher degree research. However, given that all degrees are the result of progressive or cumulative programs, the benchmarks are relevant to all students of archaeology in Australia, regardless of their year level. Over the complete course of their degree, students should expect to attain successive levels of proficiency until they achieve the full range of subject knowledge and skills upon completion of their fourth year. This document outlines benchmarks that all Honours graduates should meet, divided into three categories: subject knowledge and understanding, archaeology-specific skills and generic skills.



Benchmark statements

The following benchmark statements are arranged in three separate but closely related categories: Subject knowledge and understanding, archaeology-specific skills and generic skills. Subject knowledge and understanding define those conceptual frameworks which should underpin students' knowledge of the field and its development. Archaeology-specific skills outline the conceptual and practical knowledge a graduate needs in order to practice as a professional archaeologist or cultural heritage manager. Generic skills are the transferable knowledge that renders archaeology graduates employable in other capacities.

Subject knowledge and understanding

An Honours graduate in archaeology can be expected to possess knowledge and understanding in a range of areas, which include:

- Knowledge and understanding of the origins and development of archaeology as a discipline
- Understanding that archaeological histories are constructed and change from time to time in light of new concepts, theories, methods and discoveries
- Appreciation of the historical, social, cultural, political and economic contexts of archaeology and archaeological practice
- Familiarity with the diverse sources of evidence used by archaeologists (including excavated, documentary and oral history, representational, observational, artefactual, environmental and other scientific evidence)
- Familiarity with the basic concepts which underpin the subject (such as stratigraphy and stratigraphic context, temporality and landscape and concepts of social change)
- Familiarity with approaches to the analysis of archaeological materials (such as archaeological uses of assemblage, culture and style; approaches to classification, taxonomy and ancient technology)
- Understanding the causes of variation in the reliability of different classes of evidence from archaeological contexts (such as taphonomy, depositional processes and recovery processes)
- Knowledge of the ethical and legal frameworks for research and professional practice in archaeology
- Knowledge of the cultural values and sensitivities of archaeological materials for different cultural groups

- Appreciation of the importance of the recovery of primary data through practical experience
- Understanding the concepts and application of methods used in collecting, analysing and interpreting archaeological data
- Understanding the use of analogy and experiment in archaeological analysis
- Broad and comparative knowledge of the archaeology of a number of geographical regions
- Broad and comparative knowledge of the archaeology of a number of chronological periods
- From specialised investigation, deep understanding of one or more distinct classes of archaeological material (such as stone, ceramic, or glass artefacts or bones)
- Appreciation of the fragile and non-renewable nature of archaeological heritage, and its conservation.

Archaeology-specific skills

An Honours graduate in archaeology should be equipped to:

- Understand and apply appropriate scholarly, theoretical and scientific principles and concepts to archaeological problems
- Understand and apply archaeological fieldwork techniques including identification, surveying, mapping, recording and documentation, excavation and sampling
- Understand and apply laboratory techniques including recording and documentation, measurement, analysis and interpretation of archaeological material
- Discover and recognise the significance of material remains and landscapes in accordance with the principles embodied in the International Council on Monuments and Sites Charters, relevant legislation, and the ethical codes of Australian and international archaeological associations
- Interpret human behaviour across space at a variety of scales, including within sites (through excavation or survey data) and across landscapes (between sites)
- Observe and describe different classes of primary archaeological data and record their characteristics

By degrees

- Select and apply appropriate statistical and numerical techniques to process archaeological data, recognising the potential and limitations of such techniques
- Understand the principles and practice of consultation processes relevant to undertaking archaeological research or consulting projects.

Generic skills

An Honours graduate in archaeology will also be equipped with general and widely applicable skills, including the ability to:

- Work independently to plan, design and execute a program of research, including taking into account regulatory, funding and administrative constraints
- Critically appraise one's own and others' arguments and opinions in all aspects of professional practice
- Demonstrate professional responsiveness to changing theoretical, methodological, ethical and social contexts
- Produce logical and structured arguments supported by relevant evidence
- Communicate effectively with different audiences and stakeholders using written, oral and visual presentations, including the ability to prepare plain English reports for non-specialists
- Make effective and appropriate use of relevant information technology (such as Geographic Information Systems)
- Make critical and effective use of information retrieval skills using paper-based and electronic resources, in relevant languages
- Collaborate effectively in a team
- Appreciate the importance of health and safety procedures and responsibilities in the field and the laboratory
- Appreciate and be sensitive to cross-cultural protocols and language and be able to deal with unfamiliar situations.

What is archaeology?

Archaeology studies the past of people through the material remains left behind by those people. It uses a wide range of methods and techniques that apply to all people in all regions, from the far distant to the very recent past, and irrespective of whether a site is located on land or under water. Australian trained and based archaeologists work in and contribute to research leadership globally, in regional archaeology such as Pacific, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Asian and European archaeology as well as in Australian archaeology.

Australia is globally recognised for the high standard of its leadership in archaeological research, including research in numerous specialist sub-fields. These are as diverse as anthropological archaeology (including ethnoarchaeology), archaeology of the recent past (including archaeology of space heritage and space exploration), historical archaeology of the period of European colonial expansion, archaeological science and its technical sub-fields, such as ceramic and lithic analysis, bioarchaeology (including links with biological anthropology and palaeoanthropology), forensic archaeology and rock art studies (whether Australian, international or multidisciplinary in focus). Australia is also a world leader in archaeology linked to cultural heritage management and community-based archaeologies.

Australian archaeology

Australia itself has a unique archaeological record of global significance covering the entire period since people first arrived here from 50,000 to 60,000 years ago. Archaeological remains are widely found across Australia and are studied by a large community of professional archaeologists across the consulting and university sectors. Archaeological professional practice is also fostered through the activities of a number of representative associations (listed in Appendix 2).

The study of the material remains of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pasts of Australia, from the first colonisation of the continent by modern humans, through contact between Indigenous and European peoples after the 16th century, to modern times, has made many important contributions to our understanding of the past. Research has provided evidence for diet, technology, burial practices, art, ritual, trade and exchange, changing lifestyles in response to climate and environmental change and internal social changes. The archaeology of the more recent past has revealed evidence for contact and exchange between Europeans and Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous responses to colonisation and colonialism through traces left behind at many places across the continent.

Study of the material remains of the period since European colonisation of Australia some two hundred years ago can often be assisted considerably by documentary, pictorial and oral evidence. Explorations of this era by members of the discipline seek to illuminate processes such as European colonisation and its effects upon Indigenous peoples, the emergence of a new nation and a sense of Australian identity, and the concomitant



processes of urbanisation, capitalism and globalisation. Archaeology thus provides a fresh perspective on Australian history, including one that allows us to see groups or behaviours under-represented (or misrepresented) in documentary records.

Since some of the earliest sea voyages made by people may have been those that reached this continent, and the early Australian colonies were critically dependent on the sea for survival, the study of the material remains of maritime activity, such as shipping, maritime trade and exchange and the construction and operation of all types of watercraft also provides crucial evidence for understanding the Australian past. Research in this area includes a wide range of land-based and underwater sites.

Why is archaeology important?

History and archaeology underpin all societies and are fundamental to cultural identity and nation building. Together they create cultural heritage, or the combination of tangible objects (sites, landscapes, structures, artefacts and archives) and intangible values (the ideas, customs and knowledge that gave rise to them) that archaeologists study. As already noted, Australian archaeologists contribute to the research, documentation and preservation of cultural heritage in many different parts of the world. Archaeology is also the only way to access most of Australia's history; it provides a means for accessing the recent historical past and the past not revealed by documents, relying not only on the written word, but drawing on a range of tangible objects and their context within a physical setting.

Archaeology is an essential element of cultural heritage determination and curation and is increasingly incorporated into the forensic sciences which are important to Australia's global peace-keeping roles. Moreover, archaeology is an employment growth area, and this is likely to continue. The rapid expansion of the cultural heritage management industry accompanying a booming economy over the last decade has created unprecedented demand for graduates with archaeological skills. This trend has focused attention on the archaeological skills and knowledge of graduates and the teaching approaches which underpin university archaeology learning (see Colley 2003, 2004; Gibbs et al. 2005; Lydon 2002). In order to meet the diverse needs of research and industry, it is broadly agreed that some form of benchmarking is needed to enable comparability in the skills and knowledge of archaeology Honours graduates across Australian universities.

Archaeology in Australian universities

Australian universities provide advanced research and technical training and are the main locations for the nation's world-class archaeology research programs. Australia's university system is also recognised by the profession as providing the key professional training for both the research and consulting sectors of the broader archaeological community.

Universities provide a unique combination of the practical, ethical and theoretical education that underpins all archaeological professional practice and have a responsibility

to both consulting and research sectors in the education and training of students. Universities also include vocational training either in separate degrees (Bachelor of Archaeology) or with vocational majors or subjects such as Work Experience units. Universities are now also important providers of consulting services, especially technical and specialist services.

Australian universities are also a major provider for the training of archaeological professionals across the Asia-Pacific region and provide education and training for international students in the archaeology of Australia and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. Australian universities are engaged in research activities around the world and are often well connected to global research networks in the numerous archaeological sub-fields.

Although alternative entry to professional careers is now also afforded by specialised postgraduate degree programs and increasing numbers of professionals are enrolled in higher degree programs, the four-year Honours degree is still widely considered to be the minimum preparation for professional practice as well as higher degree candidature.

The Honours degree

An undergraduate Honours degree in archaeology consists of a pass degree (usually equivalent to three years of full-time study and usually taken as a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Archaeology) followed by an additional 'Honours year'. The purpose of a pass degree is for students to learn generic skills for lifetime learning within a structure in which archaeological concepts and discipline specific skills are taught. The Honours year is a research training course for students who want to proceed to higher degrees and, for those not wishing to study further, it indicates a capacity to work independently and to exhibit a wider and deeper understanding of archaeology than among pass degree students.

Standards

Australian universities have developed and made publicly available generic criteria for assessment and the award of marks and grades as part of government requirements for quality auditing. The extent to which such criteria have been further tailored to the detailed requirements of areas of disciplinary practice (including archaeology) varies.

For the Honours year, criteria have been developed by each university to assess students' demonstrated understanding and skills across areas of competency in archaeological research design which typically include:

- input into formulating a relevant theorised research question linked to a body of published research literature
- developing and/or applying an appropriate methodology to an appropriate body of data



By degrees

- collecting and analysing data to produce logical and evidence-based conclusions relevant to the research question
- reporting the project and the results in a competently produced and understandable written thesis
- managing practical and 'real life' aspects of conducting research.

Additional Honours coursework and seminar presentation requirements may assess other areas of competency (Beck and Balme 2005:38-9).

A standards-based, or grade-descriptors, approach (a form of criteria-referenced assessment) is currently used to assess archaeology Honours theses at all Australian universities (Beck and Balme 2005:39, Table 3). Final Honours grades are classed into First (Class I) (currently with a mark range from 80-85% to 100%), Upper Second (Class II:I or II:A) (70-75% to 80%), Lower Second (Class II:II or II:B) (60-65% to 70-75%), Third (Class III) (50-55% to 60-65%) or Fail (below 50-55%).

In general terms, the higher the mark, the greater the student's demonstrated research capacity. Hence, students awarded a First Class or Upper Second Class mark at Honours level are generally regarded as having demonstrated their potential to successfully complete research for a PhD. High marks are also needed for a student to be competitive for a postgraduate research award or grant. Currently, a minimum of First Class Honours is needed to be competitive for an Australian Postgraduate Award and in most cases marks well above the bare minimum for First Class are required.

Individual university departments have developed their own detailed assessment criteria which are used by examiners in awarding a mark and a grade for archaeology Honours in their own degree programs. Similarly, the standards of achievement for the individual benchmark statements will best be determined by teaching departments at the various universities, taking into account their own program emphases and priorities. External benchmarking and moderation are needed to ensure direct comparability of standards and grades and marks awarded for Honours across different university departments (Beck and Balme 2005:37). This document and the project which has enabled its development represent the first step towards this goal (key project groups are described in Appendix 3).

Developing the teaching and learning environment

Shared benchmarks for student achievement in an Honours degree are a vital foundation for building better education programs for archaeology. Along with such initiatives, however, other factors need attention if we are to enhance the teaching and learning environment for all students.

Archaeology is a discipline which crosses the traditional Arts/Science divide and has a greater breadth and more diversity than most other professional disciplines. Perhaps as a reflection of this diversity, as well as for other financial, geographical and historical reasons, the distribution and use of equipment and other facilities in Australian

archaeological teaching and learning environments are uneven. In some universities, for example, archaeology teaching can benefit from a redistribution of funds to the generally higher levels afforded to units categorised as science in the Commonwealth's HECS banding. In other institutions, all units are banded as humanities and receive less funding. Yet, regardless of such categorisations, graduates need to be able to apply a wide range of techniques to archaeological problems and be armed with the appropriate detailed knowledge of where to go for collaborative support for technical applications in the field and the laboratory. To ensure continued effective learning, adequate funding is required to design and run field schools and laboratory practicals of the highest national and international standards.

Australian universities could investigate further collaborative practices, such as joint teaching programs, particularly across specialist sub-fields, as well as the sharing of facilities or equipment where practicable. One of the potential strengths of the discipline is its diversity and any efforts which develop collaboration while respecting that diversity add to the range and depth of education for our students.

All of the above should also be regularly reinforced by, and intertwined with, an active archaeological research environment. Students should be exposed to the excitement of research of the highest standards and given every opportunity to take part in a wide range of field and laboratory work at their own and at other institutions, as well as in government, museum and private organisations, where practical. Formal work placements in relevant agencies, businesses or community organisations in Australia or elsewhere should become part of the teaching and learning environment at third-year level or in fourth-year Honours to enhance the employment prospects of graduates.

Where can graduates expect employment?

The diversity of archaeology means that graduates can be found working in a wide range of departments and services: within universities; in local, state and federal government and non-government agencies; and in private industry as heritage specialists. A large museum sector also provides major capacity in archaeological research and the curation of the archaeological record. Mitigating the impact of development and curation of archaeological finds fulfils one of archaeology's key ethical concerns, namely with conserving the material traces of the past, either through conservation or provision of a permanent record of destroyed cultural heritage. Australian archaeology's professional practices are governed by global ethical standards, as set by organisations such as International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the World Archaeological Congress, and specific regional ethical considerations. Australian archaeologists also work for a range of international organisations, both paid (e.g. for UNESCO) and unpaid (e.g. the World Archaeological Congress). On the applied ethical side, Australia has been a world leader in developing and applying archaeological and heritage codes of ethics and best practice (e.g. Burra Charter of Australia ICOMOS 1999).



Cultural heritage management

Most archaeology graduates in Australia find work with public and private organisations surveying, excavating and recording archaeological sites and other aspects of cultural heritage affected by development projects, such as mining and construction. A recent survey of professional Australian archaeologists demonstrated that the archaeological community in Australia was largely based in the cultural heritage management sector (over 70%), heavily professionalised, relatively well-paid and with parity between men and women in overall participation (Ulm et al. 2005).

Cultural heritage management is now a profession in which work of high quality is possible. Graduates are employed on the staff of mining, planning and energy companies and by government departments. Others work as freelance consultants. Students need to gain work experience but demand is high due to the minerals boom and despite recent legislative changes which have shifted the emphasis from archaeological to Aboriginal determined significance.

Many positions are available in the public service in all states where there are government departments that oversee the legislation and work to manage cultural heritage. Many of these positions will not involve extensive periods of archaeological work in the field, but are important in terms of the protection of archaeological and other cultural heritage sites.

Academic teaching and research

There is a pathway through higher degree research and post doctoral fellowships into academic positions. This is a realistic pathway, particularly over the next decade, as a number of vacancies will occur due to retirements in the generation of academics employed in the expansion of the universities in the 1970s. By comparison with some cultural heritage work, academic positions are relatively scarce and less well paid but do provide significant opportunities for in-depth research in both local and overseas areas, as well as the challenges and satisfaction of teaching. Opportunities exist for research and industry collaboration between universities and the wider profession through research partnerships, and university staff also undertake consultancy work from time to time.

Museums and art galleries

Employment in museums or art galleries is another option and some institutions offer opportunities for both research and curation of archaeological material in their areas of collection. In some cases, the scope of research is restricted by the general mission of the institution (e.g. state museums may prefer research that is conducted in their state).

And in general ...

Honours graduates are also sought after by employers in general because their degrees show good evidence of a capacity to work independently, complete projects involving research design and implementation, and an ability to analyse results and write reports on the results. An Honours degree in archaeology is a very valuable qualification in a wide range of careers, including many applications well beyond the professional boundaries of archaeology.

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By degrees

Appendix 1

Benchmarking Workshop, University of Melbourne, 16-17 August, 2007

Attendees

Dr Jane Balme
School of Social and Cultural Studies
Archaeology
The University of Western Australia

Associate Professor Bryce Barker
Anthropology/Archaeology
School of Humanities and Communication
University of Southern Queensland

Dr Heather Burke
Department of Archaeology
School of Humanities
Flinders University

Associate Professor John Campbell
School of Arts and Social Sciences
Department of Anthropology, Archaeology and Sociology
James Cook University

Ms Catherine Clarke
Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology
University of New England

Dr Sarah Colley
Department of Archaeology
University of Sydney

Dr Richard Cosgrove
Archaeology Program
La Trobe University

Professor Iain Davidson
Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology
University of New England

Dr Andrew Fairbairn
Archaeology Program
School of Social Science
University of Queensland

Dr Louise Hitchcock
The Centre for Classics and Archaeology
University of Melbourne

Dr Ian McNiven
School of Geography and Environmental Studies
Monash University

Mr Stephen Nichols
School of Social Science
University of Queensland

Dr Marc Oxenham
School of Archaeology and Anthropology
Australian National University

Professor Paul Tacon
School of Arts
Gold Coast Campus
Griffith University

Dr Sean Ulm
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit
University of Queensland



Appendix 2

Professional associations represented in the Benchmarking Project

Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA)

www.aima.iinet.net.au

Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology (ASHA)

www.asha.org.au

Australian Archaeological Association Inc. (AAA)

www.australianarchaeologicalassociation.com.au

Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists (AACAI)

www.aacai.com.au

Australian Institute of Archaeology

<http://www.aiarch.org.au/>

World Archaeological Congress (WAC)

www.worldarchaeologicalcongress.org



Appendix 3

The Benchmarking Archaeology Degrees Project: Key groups

The project seeks to build on current university offerings and expertise. Key groups in the process are the Benchmarking Partners, the Benchmarking Associates, the Benchmarking Team and the Advisory Team.

Benchmarking Partners

All of the current providers of four-year undergraduate Archaeology Honours degrees have been invited to participate. These 10 institutions offered a full Honours program in archaeology at the beginning of the project (2007):

- Australian National University (School of Archaeology and Anthropology)
- Flinders University (Department of Archaeology, School of Humanities)
- James Cook University (Department of Anthropology, Archaeology and Sociology)
- La Trobe University (Archaeology Program)
- Monash University
- University of Melbourne (Centre for Classics and Archaeology)
- University of New England (Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology)
- University of Queensland (School of Social Science)
- University of Sydney (Department of Archaeology)
- University of Western Australia (School of Social and Cultural Studies).

Benchmarking Associates

Representatives were invited to participate in the project as Associates from those universities where archaeology units but not a full undergraduate degree program in the subject are offered:

- Australian National University (School of Archaeology and Natural History)
- Griffith University (School of Arts)
- Macquarie University (Department of Ancient History)
- Monash University (School of Geography and Environmental Studies)
- Southern Cross University (School of Environmental Science and Management)
- University of Adelaide (School of Humanities)
- University of Auckland (Department of Anthropology)
- University of Southern Queensland (Anthropology/Archaeology, School of Humanities and Communication)
- University of Wollongong (School of Earth and Environmental Sciences)



By degrees

The role of the Benchmarking Partners and Associates is to:

- take part (through a nominee) in benchmarking workshops
- provide feedback on project materials as they are progressively articulated in the project
- communicate with their own academic units on progress and outcomes of the project.

Benchmarking Team

Overall project planning, management and reporting is carried out by the Benchmarking Team of Wendy Beck (Grant Holder) and Catherine Clarke (Project Officer). Under the general coordination of the Project Officer, the team:

- carries out detailed planning, analysis and document preparation
- liaises with and surveys the Benchmarking Partners and Associates
- disseminates to stakeholders, including students and employers, project documents and other information relevant to teaching and learning in Archaeology Honours programs.

Advisory Team

Members of the ANCATL (Australian National Committee for Archaeology Teaching and Learning), a subcommittee of the Australian Archaeological Association, form a project advisory team, supporting and maintaining commitment to the process. The team:

- provides scheduled feedback on project plans and directions
- participates in scheduled team meetings for the project
- assists with research in selected areas as mutually determined with the Benchmarking Team
- liaises with professional bodies and agencies on project aims and progress for the Benchmarking Team
- generally assists the Benchmarking Team to build and maintain interest in and support for the project in the archaeological community and associations.





ANCATL

