



IHBC RESEARCH NOTES

Market Intelligence: Local Authority Conservation Specialists Jobs Market 2019

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Executive Summary

- The Institute's data set now covers about over 1,900 posts continuously over 22 years since 1998.
- In 2019 the number of built heritage conservation posts advertised in England fell back by one-third from those seen in 2018 and was lower than at any point since 2014-15.
- It is not clear if the sector is fully recovering from the very low point of 2011 and 2012. As a consequence of the state of local government finances it is not clear if the gradually increasing trend has ceased.
- The number of posts re-advertised within six months fell sharply to five.
- The average median salary advertised for advertised posts in 2019 was £33,495 a rise of 2.9% on 2018.
- It was encouraging to note that during 2019 the number of local planning authorities that had considered IHBC membership as essential or desirable for applicants had risen to 69% having fallen back in the previous two years. IHBC membership remains as a benchmark for professional status and competence.
- Only 6.8% of local planning authorities continue to specify membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute alone as a job requirement although this rose to 27.1% when membership of RIBA or RICS were included.
- No posts in 2019 specifically requested membership of CIfA as a qualifying requirement.
- Development management advice, appeals and enforcement continued to dominate prioritised job functions and a low level of

diversification of workload functions continued to be evident in 2019.

- Few fixed-term posts related to grant schemes supported by outside agencies sought applicants, with only four Townscape Heritage and one Heritage Action Zone post being promoted.
- Regional variations in advertised posts and salaries in England in 2019 showed significant variations between Branches with only one post advertised in Yorkshire & Humberside and two in the North West (covering (Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Isle of Man, Lancashire and Merseyside).
- Elsewhere there was a small but steady turnover of posts in five of the nine English IHBC Branch areas with the number of advertised vacancies otherwise ranged from a low of four in The North (Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumbria, Tyne & Wear) to a high of eighteen in the South (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire).
- Notably higher salaries continued to be paid in London and the South East, with the South catching up, but median salary levels for new posts fell back markedly in East Anglia (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk).
- Other IHC Branch areas returned closer to to the national median level but the West Midlands continued to demonstrate a long-term trend of less well remunerated new vacancies.

NB although the IHBC is active across the United Kingdom the analysis in this Research Note relates solely to information gleaned about England's Local Authorities.

1. Background

1.1 This annual review aims to compliment the information gathered in the regular series of Local Authority Conservation Provision Studies undertaken since 2006 by IHBC with support from Historic England . [\[1\]](#)

1.2 The Institute's data set concerning advertised local authority conservation posts has been compiled since 1998. This now comprises data on over 1900 posts going back 22 years. [\[2\]](#)

1.3 The current Note summarises the job vacancies in the calendar year 2019. It assists the Institute to assemble a picture about the trends in the local government jobs market in some detail, including workload requirements, qualifications, levels of remuneration etc., together with regional variations and other long-term trends. The analysis covers all those posts that are primarily focused on built heritage conservation and it is acknowledged that job titles vary considerably – e.g. Conservation Officer, Built Heritage Officer, Heritage Manager, Senior Planner (Conservation), Senior Project Officer (Conservation) etc.

1.4 The Institute monitors vacancies on a weekly basis and although this covers Scotland and Wales (but not Northern Ireland), the statistics in this Note relate to England only unless otherwise stated. This is because the total number of vacancies annually for the other two Home Countries are statistically insignificant and insufficient in number to separately delineate the meaningful statistical trends defined for England.

1.5 Over the past four years the IHBC has captured data where local planning authorities were unable to fill vacancies at the first attempt and found it necessary to re-advertise posts within a six-month period - although in practice most re-advertisements took place within three months or less.

2. Size of the market

2.1 Posts advertised in England grew steadily in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s exceeded 120 per year with a peak of 158 per year in 2003-4. There then followed a year-on year fall until at the depth of the Recession there were only 26 per year for two years in succession. The rise in vacancies has only returned to 1990s levels in one year (2015-16) and since 2014-15 has averaged about a half to two thirds of the numbers advertised in the late 1990s.

2.2 The local authority jobs market therefore appears not have returned to its historic levels and vacancies have, broadly speaking, flatlined at a lower level. Over the last six years. It remains unclear if this has coincided with the well-publicised general loss of professional capacity after 2006 and the shrinkage in local authority employment structures.

2.3 In 2018-19 the number of posts fell by one-third from the previous year (having risen by 27% from 2017-18) and so there is some volatility when the overall number of advertised posts is quite small. As noted last year, it remains difficult to determine what the effects of the squeeze on local authority income and expenditure and the continuing merger or shared services arrangements of district councils is having on front line heritage services. Central government support for local government non-statutory functions remains a significant further concern.

2.4 In 2019 difficulties in the recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced heritage professionals - based on the prompt re-advertisement of posts - appeared to be slightly less of a problem than in recent years. Only five posts were re-advertised, (three within two months) but the lower numbers may also be reflective of fewer vacancies overall.

2.5 Notwithstanding the challenges of recruiting suitable candidates there was no evidence to suggest that standards of qualifications and experience were lowered during the process but it is equally unclear if

recruitment had ultimately been successful or whether the post remained vacant pending reconsideration of how the service would be delivered.

3. General salary levels

3.1 Salaries are almost invariably expressed as a range. [3] Employers usually expect successful appointees to commence at the bottom of the quoted scale and progress upward on the basis of qualifications and experience. [4]

3.2 Very few of the vacancies in 2019 set salary milestones related to career progression and none specified what target should be met. Examples in past years had included the gaining of an additional post-graduate qualification and/or professional institutional recognition - such as full membership of the Institute.

3.3 The average starting salary in England in 2018-19 was £31,255 with the average finishing salary £35,734 giving a median salary level of £33,495 an increase of 2.9% over 2018-19.

3.4 There are two particular caveats to be noted regarding national averages as these may potentially distort the picture. These are:

- (a) "career grade" posts with untypically low starting salaries usually recruiting newly graduated staff; or unusually high-end salaries (typically senior management positions) mainly within London councils; and,
- (b) regional variations with higher salaries being paid in London and the South-East.

3.5 The numbers of posts advertised annually also has a bearing on regional variations. Higher numbers of posts tend to decrease regional anomalies overall.

3.6 The fall in the number of advertised posts in 2019 in most English IHBC Branch areas, after an increase from 2017 must give rise to some circumspection about the regional variations. [5] Further comment about regional salary variations is made in Section 7 below.

3.7 A notable general trend is now evident that advertised salary levels are slightly lower in the last third of the calendar year and this also coincides with distinctly higher numbers of part time and/or fixed term posts. The precise reasons for this remain unclear.

4. Balance of permanent posts to temporary & part time posts

4.1 Twenty years ago the vast majority of advertised vacancies in local planning authorities were permanent and full time. Fixed-term posts were usually related to fixed-life grant-aid schemes, such as those part-funded by government centrally [6] or by the former English Heritage [7] or by

the former Heritage Lottery Fund [8]. There are also short-term posts required to cover for example, maternity leave [9] (some of these posts also being part-time).

Table 1. Permanent, fixed term & temporary posts 2019 (<i>2018 in italics</i>)				
Permanent	40	67.79%	58	65.91%
Fixed term only	13	22.03%	19	21.59%
Fixed term and part time	3	5.08%	5	5.68%
Part time only	3	5.08%	6	6.82%
TOTAL	59	100%	88	100%

4.2 The split between the types of posts is on a par with 2018 and there is a decrease in the proportion of part-time posts evident since 2017. However, the overall numbers remain quite small and appear to fluctuate from year to year. Over the last five years no principal reason has emerged for local authorities to specifying part-time working and the posts are widely geographically distributed. No job shares were advertised in 2019

4.3 There is little evidence in job descriptions to suggest that local authorities are unable or unwilling to fund full-time posts but shared services between two or more authorities or the merger of two or more authorities may be responsible and this aspect is kept under annual review.

4.4 It seems that unless the overall number of heritage assets to be managed is low - where a full-time specialist might be considered unnecessary - the other reason for part time working may be a general aim to improve the well-being and work-life balance of staff.

4.5 Of the 16 posts advertised in 2019 as fixed term, four related to a decreasing number of Townscape Heritage initiatives [10] – down from six in 2018 while only one related to the Heritage Action Zone programme instigated in 2019 [11] – down from five in 2018. Two posts were for statutory maternity cover and two were for trainee appointment of 12 months duration while the remainder were for posts of 6 to 34 months duration were for the performance of general heritage functions without a clear indication of why these were not permanent.

4.6 Up to 2017 a small number of fixed term posts had been established to deal with Heritage at Risk initiatives, but this short-lived trend did not continue in 2018 or 2019.

5. Qualifications and expertise

5.1 The stated educational requirements for posts varied significantly in 2019 as set out in Table 2. These posts usually, but not always, referred

to full membership of the IHBC and did not necessarily make explicit if this was essential or merely desirable.

Table 2. Educational Requirements (where IHBC uncategorised membership was also a consideration)				
	2019		2018	
Degree	7	11.86%	18	20.45%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification	-	-	9	10.22%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	6	10.17%	9	10.22%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + RTPI	1	1.69%	-	-
Degree + IHBC as the principal standard	29	49.15%	39	44.32%
Degree + RTPI membership only	4	6.79%	5	5.68%
Qualification	2	3.38%	3	3.41%
Qualification + IHBC	4	6.78%	2	2.27%
Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	3	5.08%	1	1.14%
Post Graduate Qualification	1	1.69%	-	-
Other: A-Level, HNC6-7 etc. only	2	3.38%	2	2.27%
	59	100%	88	100%

5.2 In addition to the requirements shown above, many local government recruiters specified the requirement of education to degree standard in any one of a range of disciplines (e.g. Planning, Architecture, Urban Design, Conservation, Surveying)[\[12\]](#); but as in past years, over half the advertised posts did not state the need for a specific qualification in a heritage related subject and it is possible that specification of IHBC membership is considered a sufficient proxy.

5.3 As recently as 2016 the Institute was able to draw some satisfaction from the fact that 71% of posts expected suitable applicants to be a full member of IHBC (or less commonly to be working towards full membership) suggesting strong brand recognition for IHBC and the significance of a recognised set of competences and professional status. In 2017 and 2018 this fell back to a disappointing 58% but in 2019 the figure had risen again to 69% albeit with a smaller sample.

5.4 Some recruiters to conservation posts in planning departments continue to specify membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute alone [6.8%] but this rises to 27.1% when membership of other allied institutions is included, in particular RIBA and RICS. No posts in 2019 specifically requested membership of CIfA as a qualifying requirement.

5.7 In recent years the proportion of posts specifying the need for a post-graduate qualification has increased moderately with more recruiters in 2019 specifying this as a requirement but not necessarily in conservation and not necessarily associated with membership of IHBC.

5.8 While a post-graduate qualification can reflect validation of a specialism, in an increasing fluid job market, given the nature of changing career paths, it is not clear if this indicates added value to employers.

6. Roles & responsibilities

6.1 Evaluation of the workload priorities as set out in job descriptions always need to be approached with caution. The allocation of percentages of time to individual tasks is almost never indicated nor are these priorities necessarily adhered to in practice.

6.2 The priorities set out in the job advertisement do not always tally with those in the formal job specification – which is inevitably more wide-ranging and may express overall long-term management objectives for the service rather than just immediate short-term priorities.

6.3 When new recruitments are made the opportunity is sometimes taken to update the job description to enable specific priorities to be refocused. However, in practice it is inevitable that short-term, time-limited, high priority workload such as development management advice will usually take priority over large-scale, long-term workload such as the heritage-at-risk issues, new conservation area character appraisals or compliance and enforcement unless these are the clear focus of the post.

6.4 It is increasingly evident that local authorities are requiring their conservation specialist appointees to prioritise a distinctly limited range of functions and certainly fewer than a decade ago. This no longer represents what the Institute would necessarily consider constitutes a well-balanced service essential for the proper exercise of statutory functions and/or the effective and appropriate management of the local historic environment. [\[13\]](#)

6.5 Development management advice or direct DM casework continued to be given the highest workload priority with 57% of job descriptions (identical to 2018) identifying this as the key priority – usually in association with appeals and enforcement. This figure rose to 64% when fixed term grant scheme posts (such as Townscape Heritage and Heritage Action Zone posts) were excluded.

6.6 The broadening and rebalancing of more broad-based heritage functions noted in 2017 leading to the possibility of more proactive than reactive services have not been borne out in either 2018 or 2019. For example, only one post to initiate a Heritage Action Zone was subject to

attempted recruitment in 2019 along with four Townscape Heritage schemes. As all these posts were also fixed term, ranging from 12 to 60 months it is not clear where the benefit would be derived for on-going local authority skills and better heritage management practices once these schemes are concluded.

6.7 Only a low percentage of conservation areas have any form of appraisal and/or management plan [\[14\]](#) and an even fewer number have documents that meet current best practice standards [\[15\]](#) notwithstanding 2017 being the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Civic Amenities Act and the first designations.

6.8 Given that local authority job descriptions aim to indicate to prospective post-holders both the range and priority of the tasks to be undertaken (and notwithstanding the observation in paragraph 6.2) not a single local authority in 2019 made conservation area designation, review or appraisal as the principal priority. Only 15% of posts made this a secondary priority and a further 17% a tertiary priority. This is likely to be the consequence of this function being large-scale, long-term workload requiring a consistent and sustained level of resource commitment.

6.9 Notwithstanding Historic England's prioritisation of heritage-at-risk initiatives in 2017 (including the training and use of voluntary groups to undertake surveys) taking action to address the findings of these has not been widely reflected in job descriptions since. In 2019 only 22% of job descriptions identified this as a workload element and only just over 5% of councils considered this a secondary priority and 9% a tertiary priority. As with conservation area appraisal and reviews, heritage at risk requires a consistent and sustained level of resource commitment and as such is unlikely to be addressed properly other than by affording it a high priority over an extended period.

6.10 As noted in the past this outline evaluation above of the workload of local authority conservation specialists does not necessarily imply that these important activities are not already being done or that a wide range of other tasks are never undertaken i.e. those generally regarded as necessary in conducting a balanced conservation service but it is a reflection of a council's commitment to heritage management in relation to the quantum of its heritage assets. [\[16\]](#)

6.11 Full job descriptions accompanying vacancies often include multifarious miscellaneous heritage management tasks required of the new post-holder. These can encompass offering technical and policy advice to owners and occupiers, providing heritage input into local plans, identifying buildings for local listing, preparing Article 4 Directions and so on, but they may not necessarily represent the actual priorities as seen by the authority's professional management team or elected councillors.

6.12 In both 2018 and 2019 several vacancies required the newly appointed post-holder to specifically, but somewhat ambiguously to identify undesignated heritage assets for listing, notwithstanding the fact that this is the role of the Secretary of State on advice from Historic England. [17]

6.13 During the latter part of 2019 a ministerial announcement was made that more funding would be made available to offer more protection to undesignated heritage assets [18] without any legislative provision to do so.

7. Regional variations

7.1 It is possible to evaluate regional variations in salaries for local authority conservation specialists from the IHBC's data sets and the figures for 2019 are set out in Table 3, but as noted in paragraph 2.3, in years when the total job vacancies (or within any one IHBC Branch area) are small this data is a less reliable guide.

7.2 During the year there was a small but steady turnover of posts in five of the nine English IHBC Branches [19] the particular exception being Yorkshire & Humberside where only one vacancy appeared and in the North West (Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Isle of Man, Lancashire and Merseyside) where only two vacancies were advertised in 2019.

7.3 The number of advertised vacancies otherwise ranged from a low of four in The North (Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumbria, Tyne & Wear) to a high of eighteen in the South (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire).

7.4 The median variations in salaries between Branches are shown in Table 3 but where there were small numbers of vacancies (e.g. the two vacancies in the North West) the sample sizes obviously need to be treated with caution.

Region	Sample	Median (£)	Variation (%)
East Anglia	5	30,438	- 9.12%
East Midlands	10	31,274	- 6.63%
London	9	36,907	+ 10.18%
North	4	33,619	+ 0.37%
North West	2	33,065	- 1.28%
South	8	36,518	+ 9.02%
South East	9	36,612	+ 9.03%
South West	5	32,588	- 2.70%
West Midlands	6	29,517	- 11.87%

Yorkshire	1	31,175	- 6.92%
Total (& Average)	59	(33,495)	

Note: Paragraph 7.3 caution on some small sample sizes

7.5 As might be expected median salary scales in London have generally been consistently higher than in other regions, reflecting higher living and travelling costs and in 2018 the advertised posts were over 20% higher than the England average. These have consistently influenced the national averages since data was first collected in 1998 but in 2019 the level was notably lower attributable to fewer vacancies for heads of service and team leaders.

7.6 While pay in the South and the South East over the long-term has also been consistently somewhat higher than the national average (possibly influenced by the proximity to London and high numbers of designated heritage assets) the overall figures for 2019 have been distorted by the nine vacancies in the East Midlands (Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire) and nine in the Southeast accounting for 30% of the total. In the West Midlands salaries have been persistently low over the lifetime of this analysis (1998) but the significantly lower salaries in East Anglia (with its high numbers of heritage assets) is a new development in 2019.

8. Concluding Note

8.1 The jobs market for local authority conservation specialists in 2019 has contracted in 2019 to similar numbers in 2016 and 2017. The anticipated gradual rebuilding of capacity in 2018 from the low point of 2011-12 onward has not clearly materialised.

8.2 The pressure on local government finances in 2019 continued to be reflected in mergers or joint management arrangements for the operation of district council services and the impact on the provision of specialist conservation advice will no doubt continue to be felt in the short term. It remains to be seen if this will result in a measurable reduction in service provision and/or a decrease in posts stemming from the economies sought by such reorganisations and rationalisations in the current year.

8.2 The Institute intends to web-publish a further market intelligence report on the local authority conservation specialist jobs market 2020 in early 2021.

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Endnotes

1. Prior to April 1st 2015 this support came from English Heritage
2. Between 1998 and c.2009, information concerning local authority vacancies were drawn principally from the weekly pages of Planning magazine. Thereafter the decline in planning related posts, the switch to a fortnightly publication of Planning coupled with the development of the IHBC's web-based jobs pages saw the advertising of conservation posts move almost exclusively from the former to the latter. Although posts may occasionally be advertised elsewhere, the data in this Note drawn from these two sources is thought to be near definitive.
3. Occasionally only a fixed starting of finishing salary is stated. Ranges are usually given even where appointments are short-life or fixed term.
4. In the past in salary progression was also on the basis of an annual increment within the overall scales but the steps within the quoted range is usually short.
5. To compensate for the effect of unusually low or unusually high ends of salary ranges a comparative analysis is also made by subtracting the three highest and three lowest starting and finishing salaries during the year from the overall sample. This nevertheless generates very similar figures to the overall averages above i.e. generates a typical "smoothed" starting salary in 2019 of £31,234, a finishing salary £35,801, and a median of £33,522.
6. For a time a number of temporary or fixed-term jobs were also funded by the Planning Delivery Grant - particularly to meet the requirements of Best Value Performance Indicator 219 on conservation area appraisals. This national performance indicator was trialled in 2004-5 and introduced in 2006 but abandoned by central government in 2010. Some authorities undertook a programme of appraisals in anticipation of a future national requirement for service uplift, while others simply used the indicator as a pretext to justify additional resources for conservation services. The problems with the indicator were various, not least it not actually being an indicator [as it did not encourage service improvement]. Many authorities also had such a backlog of appraisals to complete do they could not justify the long-term resource commitment.
7. Such as fixed term Buildings at Risk Officers
8. Now the National Lottery Heritage Fund [NLHF]
9. Some of the posts covered being part-time in the first place.
10. Projects ranging from 12 to 54 months duration.
11. Generally of 48 to 54 months duration.
12. In recent years it had been noticeable that fixed term grant-aided project management schemes have also asked for a qualification in PRINCE 2
13. Estimated to be about 25%

14. Estimated to be in the order of 10%
15. See IHBC Guidance Note: Annual Conservation Management Statements – Best Practice GN2014/2 Sept 2014, accessible at: http://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance_notes/consManag.html
16. See IHBC Guidance Note GN2014/3 Oct 2014 Planning Authority duties in the provision of appropriate specialist advice in England, accessible at https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance_notes/index.html
17. It would appear that some local authorities are unaware of the procedures under which Historic England will now respond to requests to list buildings when this is not a specific urgent threat.
18. Via “local communities” and implying a new tier of statutory protection
19. Corresponding in area to the relevant government/RTPI etc. regions