

Abstract

Twenty-five years of Profiling the Profession surveys have consistently shown that the United Kingdom's professional archaeologists come overwhelmingly from relatively affluent backgrounds. Anecdotal evidence suggests that archaeology student cohorts are more diverse than the professional field, but student cohorts undertaking courses focused on ancient Near Eastern (ANE) archaeology are even more heavily skewed toward more affluent socioeconomic demographics.

This article presents the results of a pilot study collecting data concerning the socioeconomic background of undergraduate archaeology students, their perceptions of ANE archaeology and its practitioners, and their motivations for choosing whether to study ANE-focused courses during their archaeology degrees. The results identify broad relationships between the socioeconomic backgrounds of students and their degree program decision-making, revealing a series of push factors that discourage engagement with the subdiscipline.

Introduction

Postcolonial critique has highlighted how the field practices of disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology are extractive in nature, being shaped fundamentally by power imbalances between the global North and the global South (e.g., Bruchac 2014; Porr and Matthews 2019; Porter 2010). A growing corpus of research addresses manifestations of this in ancient Near Eastern (ANE) archaeology specifically,¹ where contrasts between foreign and local team members can be particularly extreme, especially where seasonal hired excavators are employed (Mickel 2021; Quirke 2010). In the UK, the case study used here as the author's immediate research environment and the most prominent colonial power in the study region during the early years of ANE archaeology, some of the difficulties that ANE archaeology has experienced in wrestling with its colonial inheritances arguably lie in its lack of diversity as a discipline. This is because a lack of diversity in UK universities perpetuates the problematic power dynamics associated with colonial structures and stands in the way of truly fixing problems. Therefore, research that interrogates connections between a lack of diversity at home and extractive practices in host countries is necessary for a more nuanced effort toward decolonizing the field.

Such research is hampered, however, by a paucity of data concerning a key variable: socioeconomic background. Unlike race and ethnicity, sex, or disability, for example, socioeconomic status (SES) and class are not protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010, and UK universities have no obligation to collect data concerning them.² Consequently, despite anecdotal evidence for the ANE subdiscipline's particularly affluent composition, no specific data exist for its disciplinary demographics. The pilot

study presented here was designed to begin to rectify this data gap and to highlight initial patterns and avenues for further research.

Diversity in UK Archaeology

Widening participation in higher education has been a key goal of UK and devolved governments since the “Kennedy report” (Kennedy 1997), an aim of university associations (e.g., Russell Group 2015, 2020), and an objective with dedicated charities (e.g., Sutton Trust 2023). Pressure to diversify access to higher education led to the establishment of the Office for Fair Access in England in 2004, replaced by the Office for Students in 2018, and, in Scotland, the Commissioner for Fair Access in 2016. The latter has produced annual reports on progress and occasional papers on specific issues, such as student retention and graduate outcomes and destinations (Scott 2018). Educational inequalities between socioeconomic groups remain a focus of parliamentary briefing papers, yet the lowest-SES students continue to progress to university at around half the rate of the highest-SES students and drop out nearly twice as often (Bolton and Lewis 2023:15, 21).

Even after controlling for educational attainment, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds apply to higher education institutions (HEIs) less frequently than their more affluent peers, especially to the elite Russell Group institutions (Anders 2012),³ in part due to difficulties navigating the admissions process (Wyness 2017), guidance for which is targeted most directly at the highest-achieving students already best supported to apply to the most academically selective institutions (Gamsu 2015; UCAS 2016:4).

When low-SES students do enter higher education, they drop out at higher rates than their higher-SES peers (Crawford 2014; Social Market Foundation 2017). Those who complete their studies acquire graduate jobs at a much lower rate than the general student population even when they achieve higher degrees (Coulson et al. 2018).

Alongside broadening the demographics applying to higher education, increasing overall numbers of applicants, and acceptances, has also been a preoccupation of government and is often used as a measure of successful higher education policy (Younger et al. 2018). Perhaps even more important for archaeology courses and degrees, however, is preventing *falling* numbers of applicants and retaining those students who embark on them. The last decade has seen severe cuts to archaeology funding and departments in UK HEIs, a problem that has seen widespread coverage and condemnation expressed in the popular press (e.g., Braddick 2013; Keogh 2012; Shaw 2021; Shepperson 2017), by unions (e.g., Birmingham UCU 2012; University and College Union 2021), and by learned societies (e.g., European Association of Archaeologists 2021; Society of Antiquaries London 2021). To protect the survival of

archaeology departments in UK HEIs, then, it is important that we understand what draws students to our courses and degrees, and what push factors discourage them.

That UK-based archaeology is characterized by homogeneity is well established. Despite University Archaeology UK's pride in the diversity of the educational background of archaeology students (University Archaeology UK, n.d.), that diversity drops sharply when students complete their studies, leaving a far narrower demographic field in professional archaeology. Successive Profiling the Profession studies (Aitchison 1999; Aitchison and Edwards 2003, 2008; Aitchison et al. 2020; Aitchison and Rocks-Macqueen 2013) have demonstrated that the composition of archaeological professionals in the UK is overwhelmingly white, British, highly educated, and from relatively affluent backgrounds. No comparable statistics are available for ANE-focused researchers or students, but Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) data demonstrate that undergraduate ANE teaching correlates strongly with institutions with the most affluent student cohorts (Figure 1).⁴

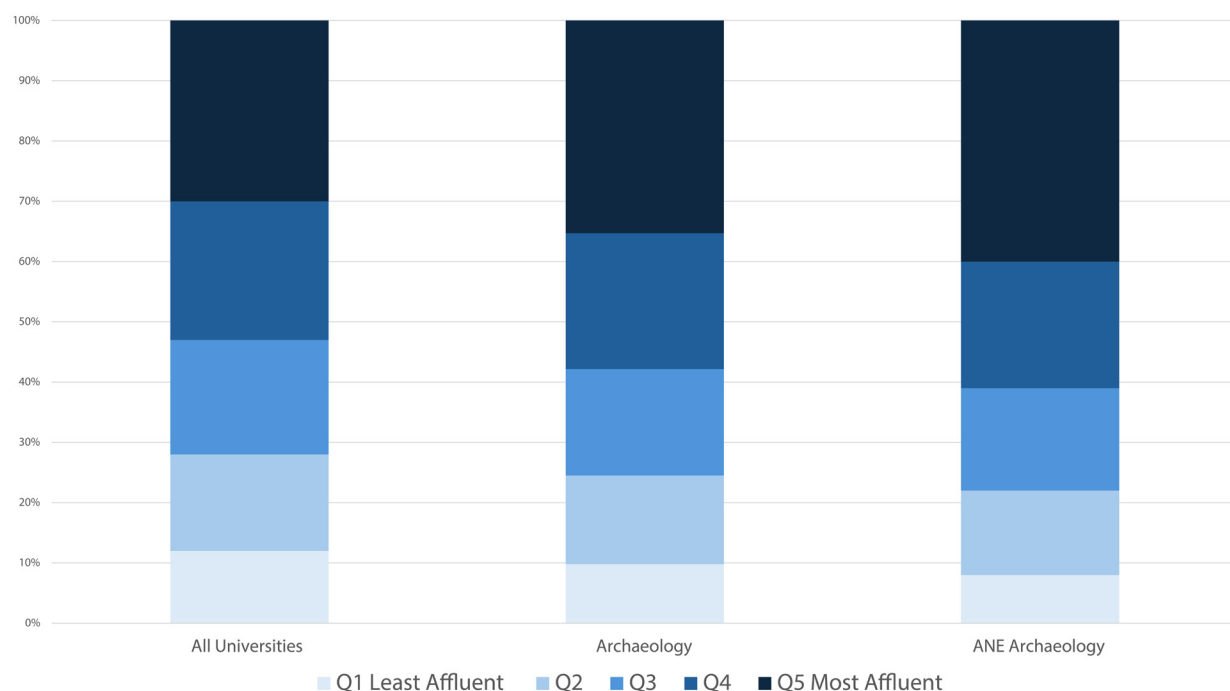


Figure 1. UCAS-placed applicants by area background (Q1 = least affluent; Q5 = most affluent) at all institutions, institutions providing undergraduate archaeology degrees,⁵ and institutions providing undergraduate ANE teaching (UCAS 2023).⁶

Awareness of UK archaeology's lack of diversity is high. The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) has recently launched a project gathering data concerning inequalities in the UK archaeological workforce, highlighting a need to widen participation to create a more attractive and rewarding career. Similar sentiments are

seen in the British Academy's *Reflections on Archaeology* (Barker et al. 2016) and in the Campaign to Save British Archaeology's priorities (Save Archaeology 2021).

However, specific discussion of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in archaeology lean, for good reason, heavily toward race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability (the literature is vast, but see, e.g., Blackmore et al. 2016; Brunache et al. 2021; Cobb and Crellin 2022; Dowson 2000; Flewellen et al. 2021; Franklin et al. 2020; Kamash 2021; Overholtzer and Jalbert 2021). Recent intersectional archaeological EDI discourse has more directly addressed socioeconomic unfairness (e.g., Heath-Stout and Hannigan 2020; Rivera Prince et al. 2022), but EDI strategies and policies presented by UK archaeological institutions that refer explicitly to various EDI characteristics rarely refer to SES (e.g., Cardiff University 2023; Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2022; Council for British Archaeology 2023; University of York 2023).

Related disciplines have devoted more attention to socioeconomic diversity and the barriers that place limits on it. In early 2023 the Network for Working-Class Classicists carried out a survey on class demographics and experiences, and Marco Perale (2022) has investigated class background and its relationship with uptake of language courses in classics at the University of Liverpool. Similar concerns about wealth, educational background, and sociocultural roots across Eastern Mediterranean- and ANE-focused disciplines have been identified by the Save Ancient Studies Alliance in its analyses of ancient cultures research in the United States (SASA 2021).

Even where protected characteristics are foregrounded, survey respondents in archaeology-adjacent disciplines have expressed deep concerns about class fairness in equalities research. For example, the Council of University Classical Departments (CUCD) Equality and Diversity Report, following the UK's Equality Act 2010, opts not to address class directly because it is not a protected characteristic and because defining class backgrounds is difficult (Leonard and Lovatt 2020:19). However, as the CUCD Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee itself is keen to stress, almost a fifth of respondents address class discrimination and socioeconomic inequalities in free-text comments despite not being asked to do so, and many state their surprise that data were not sought on this subject specifically (Canevaro et al. 2021). In fact, the report's authors note:

Issues of class were most likely to be considered alone and expressed most vehemently as ignored but as affecting every element of the profession. Respondents identified Classics as a field dominated by white male privilege, exemplified most in the preponderance of Classicists who have been privately educated and who have backgrounds from Oxford and Cambridge universities. (Leonard and Lovatt 2020:54)

To improve working relationships, widen talent pools, and revitalize departments, more diverse representation is clearly necessary. Despite this need, few established or organized strategies are in place to strengthen ties with schools or develop pathways into archaeological study at university. Once students do reach university, retention is a problem, and many leave the discipline quickly after graduation. A substantial drop in the discipline's diversity occurs at this point, leaving professional archaeologists far more homogeneous than student cohorts (Cobb 2015). Little detailed statistical work exists concerning diversity in UK archaeology departments, and even less seeks to interpret it. Consequently, this pilot study provides some statistical data for socioeconomic diversity among undergraduate ANE archaeology cohorts and highlights patterns in perceptions of the discipline that can act as a launching point for more detailed discussions of widening participation strategies.

Survey Distribution and Content

Undergraduate students were selected as the target demographic for initial data collection on the basis that they make up the largest cohort of university students studying archaeology and therefore maximize potential respondents in the short time frame available for the study. A link to an online questionnaire was distributed to lecturers and administrators at UK universities teaching ANE topics at the undergraduate level, to be circulated among their undergraduate cohorts for two weeks in September 2022.⁷ To ensure the survey was completed exclusively by undergraduate students at UK institutions, it was not distributed via any other avenues. Ethics approval for the questionnaire and its distribution and processing was granted by the University of Glasgow College of Arts Research Ethics Panel on August 2, 2022 (application 100210130). To minimize issues of gatekeeping or of students feeling at risk of their data being accessible or being used against them by distributing staff, the questionnaire was fully anonymous and did not ask any questions about participants' protected characteristics, location, or institutions attended that could allow them to be identified.

The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions. The first two questions asked participants to consent to their responses being used for research and confirm they understood their rights of access and objection. Thereafter questions were subdivided into five sections. Respondents were free to refuse to answer any question except the first. The five sections included the following:

ANE before university (questions 3–10): concerning participants' experiences, if any, of ANE topics before university and their perceptions and expectations of the discipline and its practitioners.

ANE at university (questions 11–13): determining whether participants were currently undertaking ANE-focused courses or modules and why they had chosen not to, if that were the case.

Current perceptions (questions 14–15): addressing any changes in the participants' perceptions of ANE archaeology and its practitioners after having been exposed to the discipline at university.

Educational background (questions 16–18): collecting data concerning the respondents' own education and that of their parents.

Socioeconomic background (questions 19–21): asking whether respondents identify with a particular class background, their parents' or guardians' occupations, and whether they were ever eligible for free school meals. Free school meals are provided to UK schoolchildren from socioeconomically disadvantaged families and are used across the UK as a proxy for deprivation (e.g., Gorard and See 2009; House of Commons Education Committee 2021).⁸

The final two sections were placed thus to minimize the degree to which the respondents were actively thinking about their own backgrounds while describing their perceptions of ANE archaeology and other persons involved in the discipline. Most of questions 16–21 were designed to provide data that could be compared with broader UK demographic statistics and to help identify whether any respondents seemed to understand classes in notably different ways.

Respondents were all asked to respond to 18 questions, with a further 4 (questions 3, 5, 12, and 14) requiring a positive or negative answer to the previous question.

Results of the Survey

A relatively small sample of 40 people completed the survey but nevertheless reveals a range of patterns contrasting undergraduate ANE and other archaeology. Of these, 23 (57%) were currently studying ANE topics, and 17 (43%) were not (Figure 2).

Socioeconomic and Educational Background

In terms of their class identities, respondents are evenly spread, with exactly half each of the cohort identifying as working class or middle class. Recent large-scale UK surveys see 48–60% of persons identifying as working class and 36–40% identifying as middle class (Evans and Mellon 2016; Social Mobility Commission 2021), meaning that the percentage of respondents who identify as working class in the study falls within the range of the general UK public, but respondents who identify as middle class are overrepresented by 10–14%.

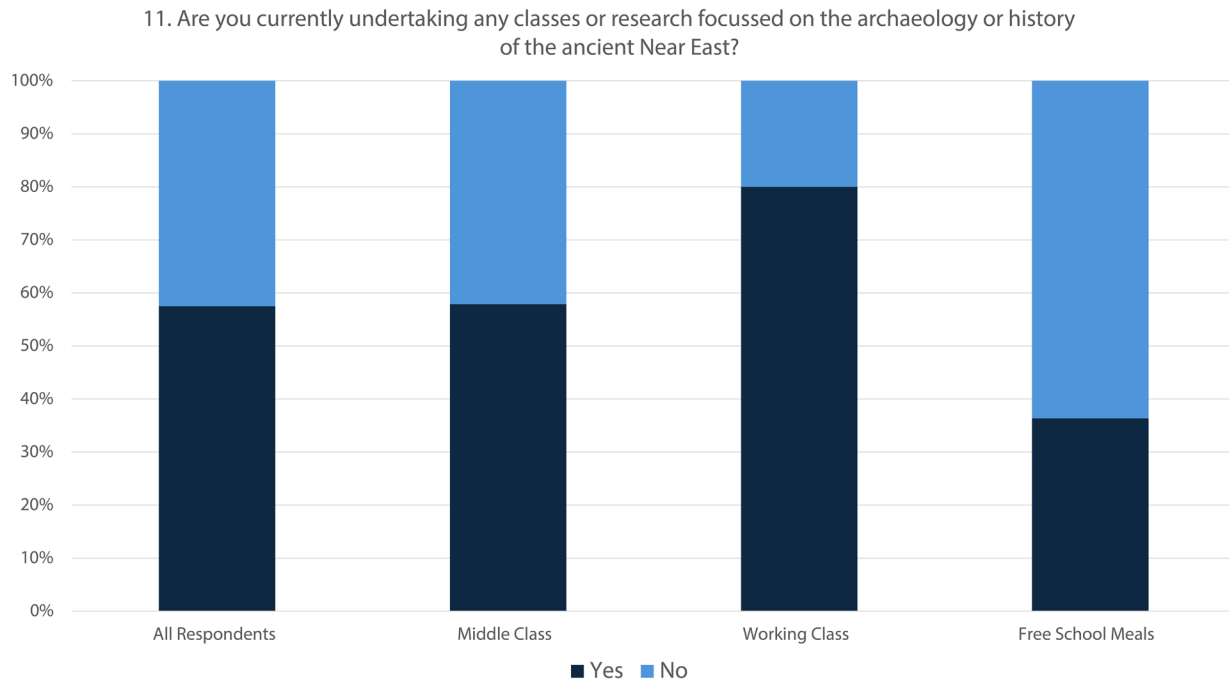


Figure 2. Answers to question 11.

Four (10%) respondents had attended fee-paying schools. This is almost double the 5.3% of UK school pupils at fee-paying schools in 2022, which represents a long-term peak in attendance (Independent Schools Council 2022:3; National Statistics 2022). However, the survey cohort is not particularly out of step with UK higher education sector numbers. Overall, 9% of UK higher education students come from fee-paying schools, and some of the universities in which this study was circulated present far higher rates, ranging from 12% of pupils at the University of Liverpool to 48% at the University of Oxford (Montacute and Cullinane 2018).

Perhaps surprisingly, free school meal recipients are also overrepresented. Eleven (33%) respondents who attended school in the UK had received free school meals at some stage, a rate exceeded only by secondary school pupils in Northern Ireland, and more than double the rates of free school meal eligibility in Scotland, England, and Wales.⁹

Respondents' parents or carers were generally employed in occupations leaning toward the more affluent end of the spectrum (Figure 3), and at much higher rates than UK averages. The UK National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) scheme of eight occupational categories was used to allow comparison with UK general populace statistics, and with Profiling the Profession surveys, which also use these categories and the 14-years-of-age benchmark.¹⁰

Eighteen (45%) respondents said their carers were employed in the two most affluent categories, and 25 (62.5%) selected occupational categories in the top half of

earners. These rates are considerably higher than the UK average. Excluding full-time students, 31% of UK adults are employed in the top two employment categories, and 53% in the top half (Office for National Statistics 2017:KS611UK). Cross-tabulating parents'/carers' employment with class identities and free school meals gives a more granular picture. Among the survey respondents, 64% of middle class and 50% of working class respondents' carers were in the top two categories, and 85% of middle class respondents, and 80% of working class respondents, stated their parents/carers were employed in the top half of occupations. Free school meal recipients reported their parents'/carers' employment as being in the bottom two categories 54% of the time, but the remaining respondents, including those identifying as working class, exhibit significantly higher SES backgrounds than the general UK public. This is not surprising in light of recent research into class identity in the UK. Subjective and objective measures of socioeconomic status frequently diverge sharply, and many socioeconomically privileged people identify as working class (Crew 2020; Evans and Mellon 2016; Friedman et al. 2021; Heath et al. 2013).

Despite these findings, the cohort as a whole is still less affluent than the UK HE sector and the professional UK archaeological workforce. Fifty-one percent of carers for undergraduate students enrolled in 2020–21 were employed in the top two brackets, 73% in the top half (HESA 2022),¹¹ and 62% of professional archaeologists' carers were in the top two categories at age 14, and 78% in the top half (Aitchison et al. 2020).

Educational background is similarly elite among the survey respondents' carers. Twenty-three (58%) respondents reported that their carers had tertiary education, and 20 (50%) had bachelor's degrees or higher (Figure 4). Only 27% of UK adults held any tertiary qualifications as of the 2011 census.¹² Even among all undergraduates, only 45% have at least one parent/carer with a higher education qualification (HESA 2022).

Breaking the survey cohort down, we find clear splits between the middle class, working class, and free school meal groups. Sixteen (84%) middle class respondents' carers had tertiary education, 13 (68%) of whom held bachelor's degrees or higher. Thereafter a sharp drop-off occurs, with four (40%) of working class respondents reporting tertiary education, all of which are bachelor's degrees or higher, and four (36%) free school meal recipients also reporting tertiary qualifications, three (27%) of which are bachelor's degrees or higher.

Meanwhile, separating respondents who are or are not undertaking ANE study shows 65% of ANE students with parents in the top half of employment categories compared to 60% of non-ANE, and 57% of ANE students with degree-educated parents compared to 41% of non-ANE.

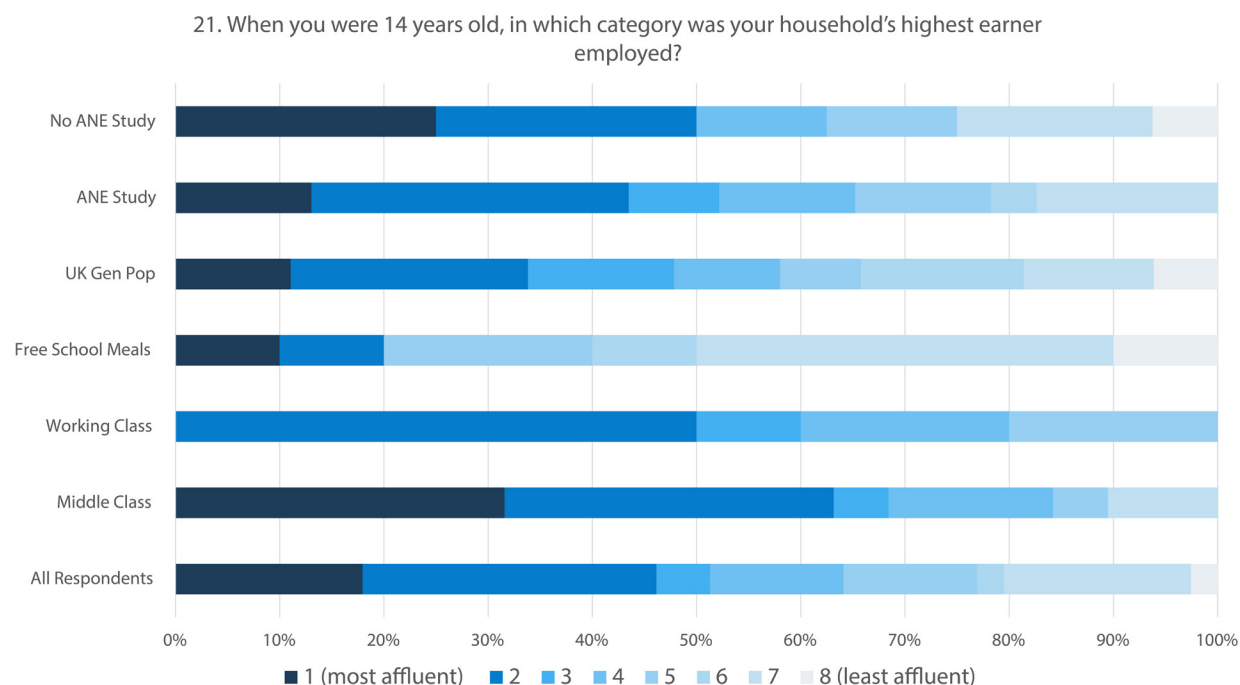


Figure 3. Responses to question 21, 2011 UK census results, and 2022 HESA HEI records (HESA 2022; Office for National Statistics 2017:KS611UK).¹³

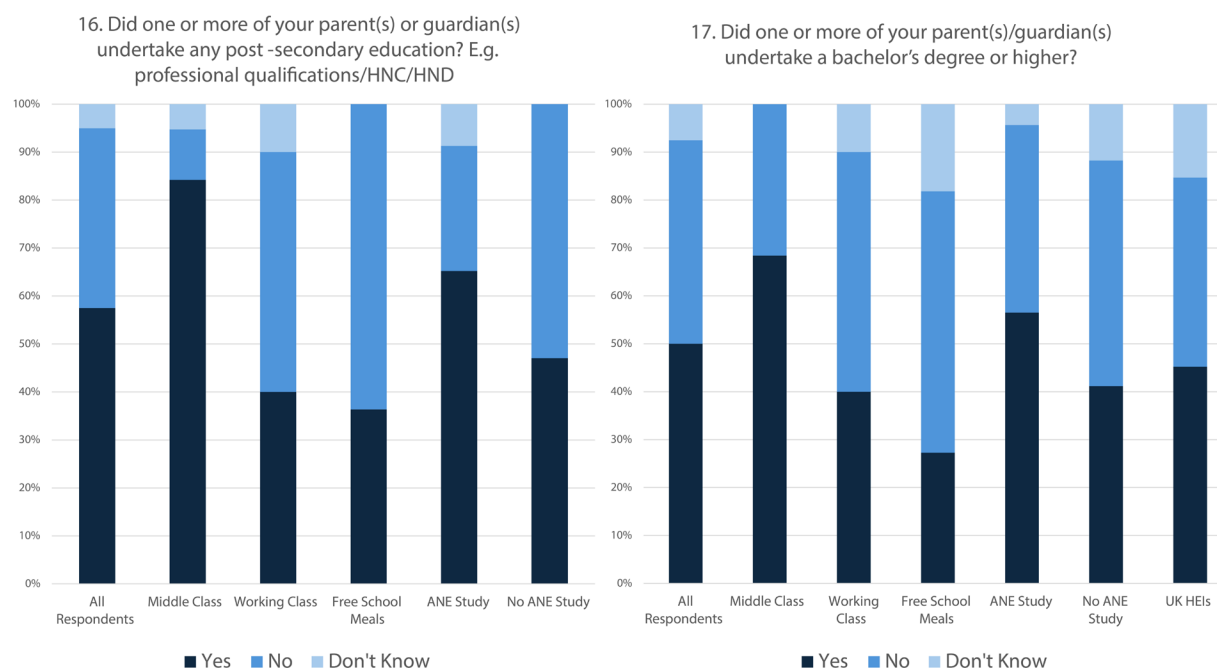


Figure 4. Responses to questions 16–17, 2011 UK census results, and HESA 2020–21 undergraduate data (HESA 2022; Office for National Statistics 2017:QS501UK).

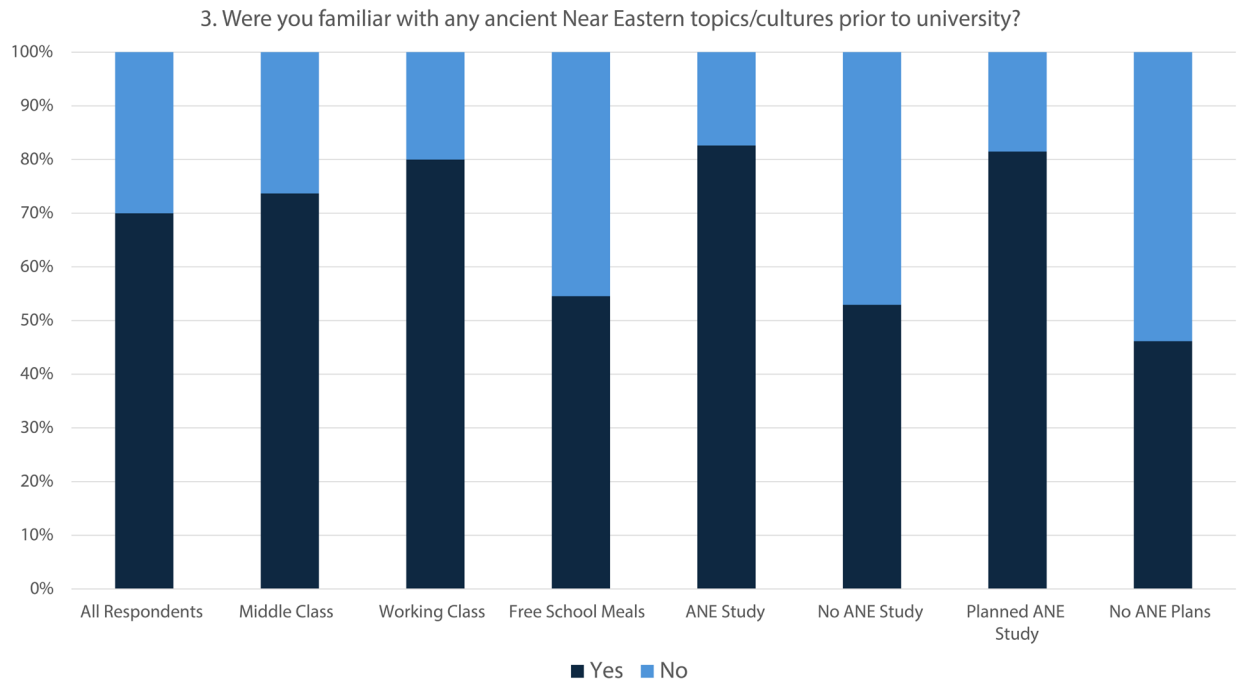


Figure 5. Responses to question 3.

Familiarity with ANE Topics

Twenty-eight (70%) said that they were familiar with ANE topics before university, and 12 (30%) said that they were not (Figure 5). Cross-tabulating this with answers to question 11 reveals 19 (83%) current ANE students, but only 9 (53%) not currently studying ANE topics were familiar with them before university. Of the 27 (67.5%) respondents planning to study ANE topics at some point in the future, 22 (81%) had prior familiarity with ANE material. By contrast, of the 13 (32.5%) students with no future ANE study plans, only 6 (46%) had familiarity with ANE topics before university.

Similarly, cross-tabulating with question 12 shows that of the seven respondents who do not currently study ANE topics but plan to take them up in the future, five (71%) were familiar with them before university. By contrast, of the ten students not currently studying ANE topics and with no plans to in the future, six (60%) said they had no familiarity with ANE topics before university.

Six (55%) free school meal recipients, 14 (74%) middle class respondents, and 8 (80%) working class respondents said that they were aware of ANE topics before university. Only a minority of students in all categories had encountered ANE topics at school (Figure 6).

Beyond school, respondents familiar with ANE topics became so via a variety of sources (Figure 7). Documentary film, museums, and nonfiction books dominate across all demographics, with varying popularity. Gaming is a far more popular source of ANE

familiarity among free school meal recipients than other respondents, while fictional literature is a significantly more popular source among working class students than other respondents.

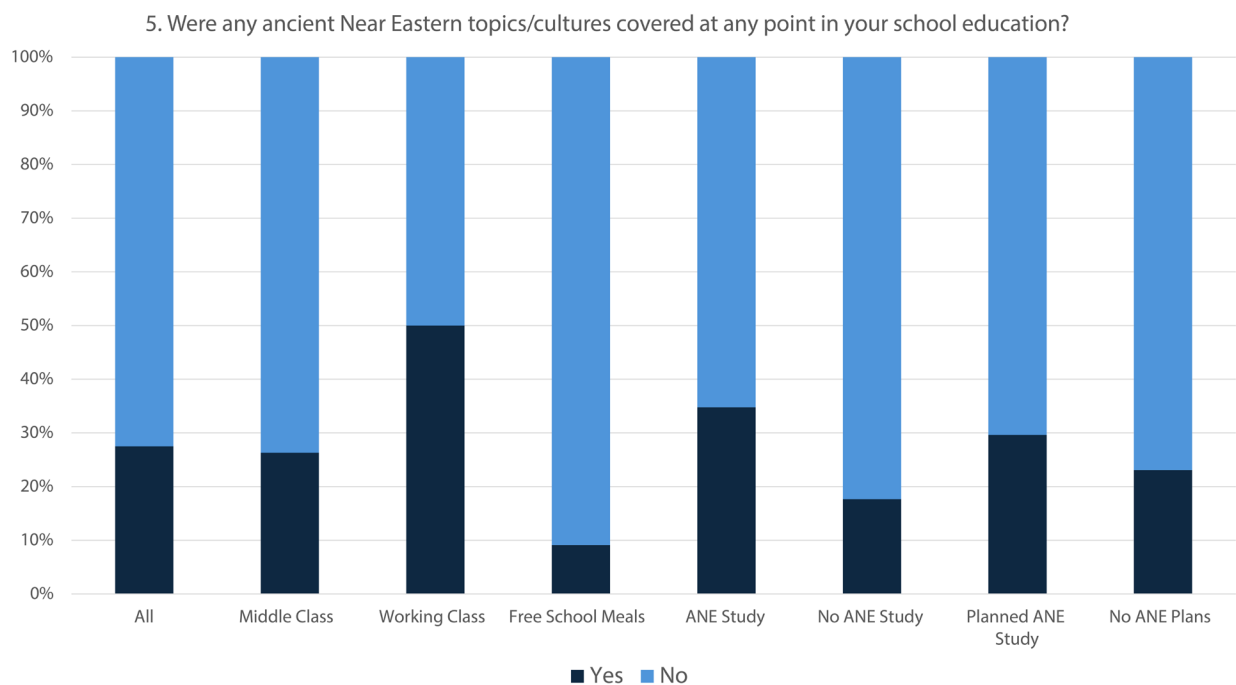


Figure 6. Responses to question 5.

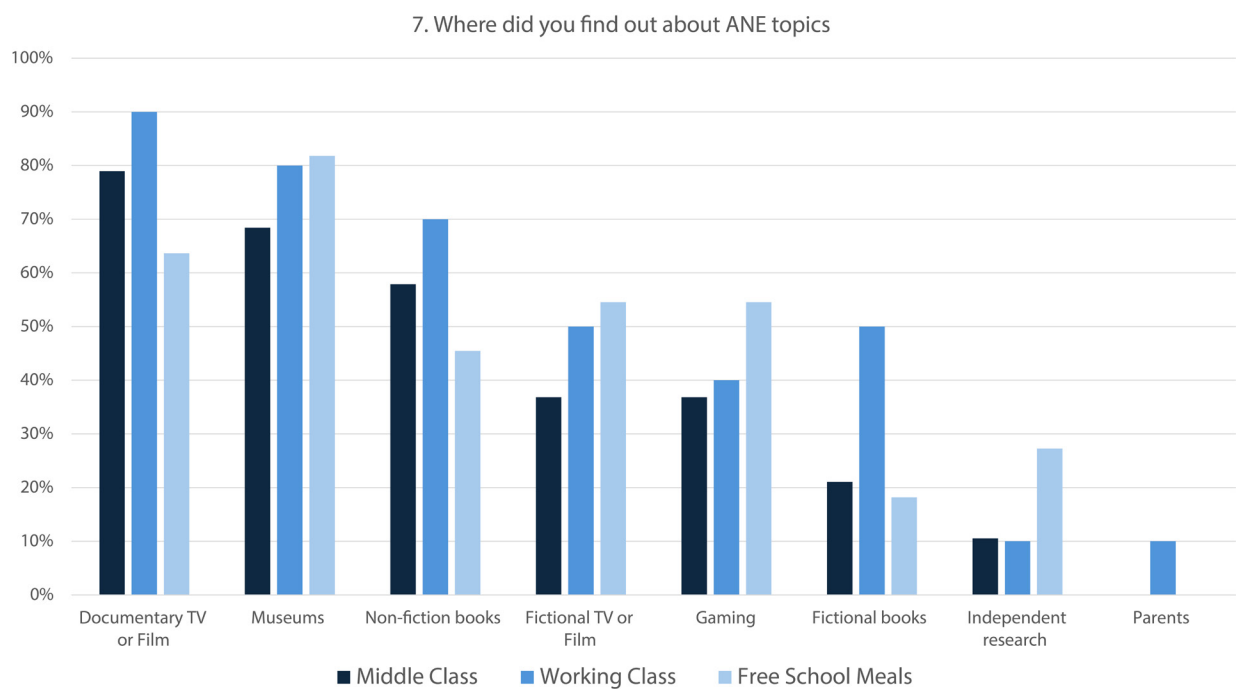


Figure 7. Responses to question 7.

Perceptions of ANE Archaeology

Despite the correlation between familiarity with ANE topics and pursuing ANE topics at university revealed by questions 3, 11, and 12, a lack of familiarity was not frequently offered as a reason why respondents are not pursuing ANE study. Only a single student (8%) listed lack of familiarity as a factor. By far the most common push factor preventing students from taking up ANE-focused courses is that these courses are not relevant to their career plans (seven [54%]) (Figure 8). That ANE-specific courses are not considered relevant to the career plans of some students studying archaeology in UK HEIs may seem unsurprising—after all, many may be focusing on the archaeology of other regions or may not intend to pursue a career in archaeology at all. However, when seen alongside perceptions of the ANE subdiscipline, these findings may speak to general attitudes toward ANE archaeology as a particularly unrealistic career for some students.

Few respondents in any demographic thought a career in ANE history or archaeology was a particularly realistic possibility (18–21%), but some were far more likely to believe it is unrealistic (Figure 9). Free school meal recipients believed it to be unrealistic at a far higher rate (64%) than working class respondents (40%), who were in turn more likely to believe it unrealistic than middle class students (32%). As such, while ANE archaeology is not seen as a particularly likely career by any demographic, there seems to be more room for doubt among the more affluent students, and far more confidence that it is not a possibility at all among the less affluent.

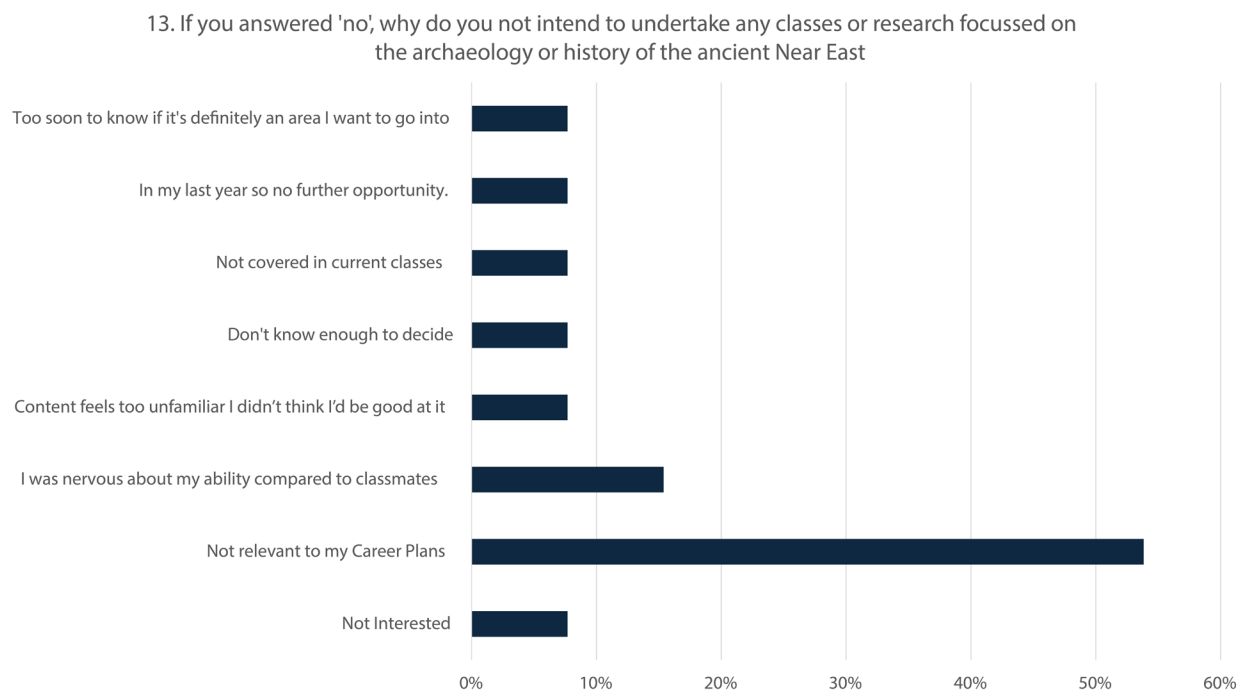


Figure 8. Responses to question 13.

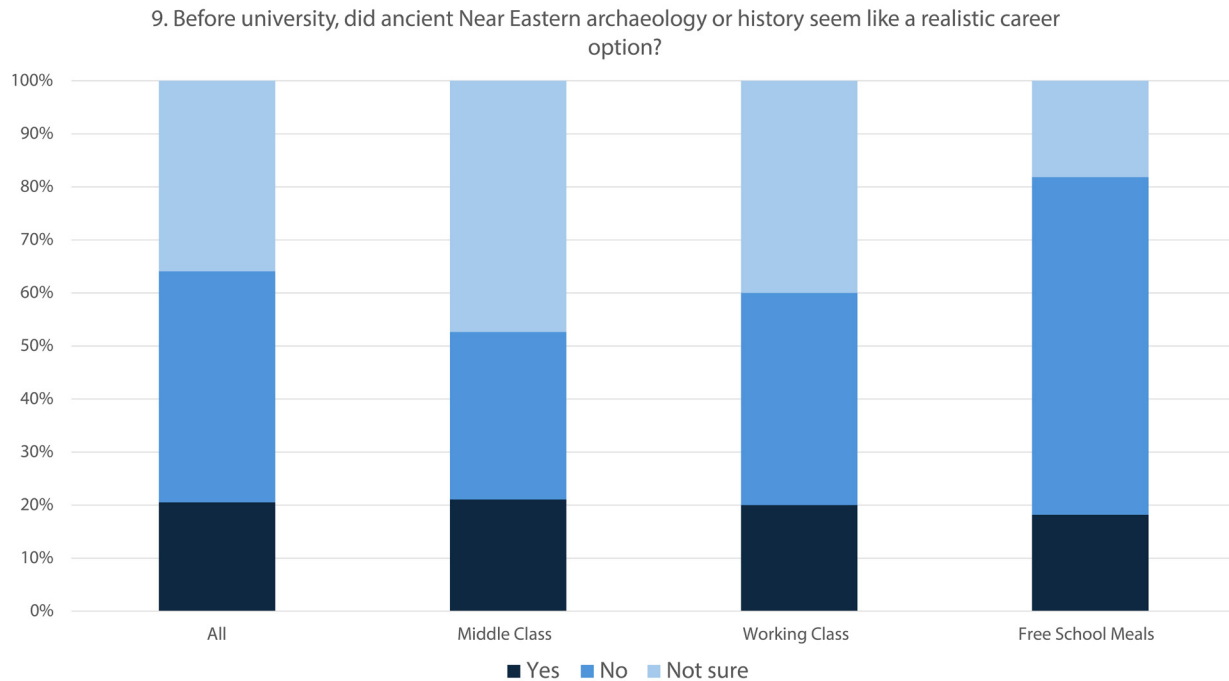


Figure 9. Responses to question 9.

It is possible that part of the reason why some respondents do not foresee a likely career in ANE archaeology may be that they do not believe it to be a career frequently followed by persons like themselves. Free-text responses are most illustrative here. One working class respondent said, for instance, that “people who have enough money to be able to go on excavations” would characterize the discipline, and a free school meal recipient offered “middle class individuals from financially stable families which would fully support their offspring.”

Some respondents also compare the discipline to, or conflate it unfavorably with, related disciplines that have their own elitist associations. For example, one middle class respondent observed: “In terms of social classes, I always thought it would be people from upper or higher middle class. As I perceived from studying Classics from a low middle class background, it is clear that the subject was for someone of a higher background. Definitely in terms of the way it was conducted.” Another middle class respondent said: “I think it is associated with the same sort of privilege that people who study Latin in secondary school have.” A third stated that “Assyriology and Egyptology especially have always appeared as subjects dominated by upper class white men.”

When respondents were asked whether they would have associated any specific concepts with ANE archaeology and history before university, “upper class” (27 [68%]), “middle class” (28 [70%]), “elitism” (20 [50%]), and “high culture” (19 [48%]) dominated the responses (Figure 10).

Two (18%) free school meal recipients and two (20%) working class respondents, but no middle class respondents, associated the discipline with being working class. Five (45%) free school meal recipients and five (26%) middle class, but no working class respondents, associated “diversity” with ANE archaeology and history. Despite this perception of diversity, “accessibility” was associated with the discipline by very few respondents from any background, and no working class respondents at all.

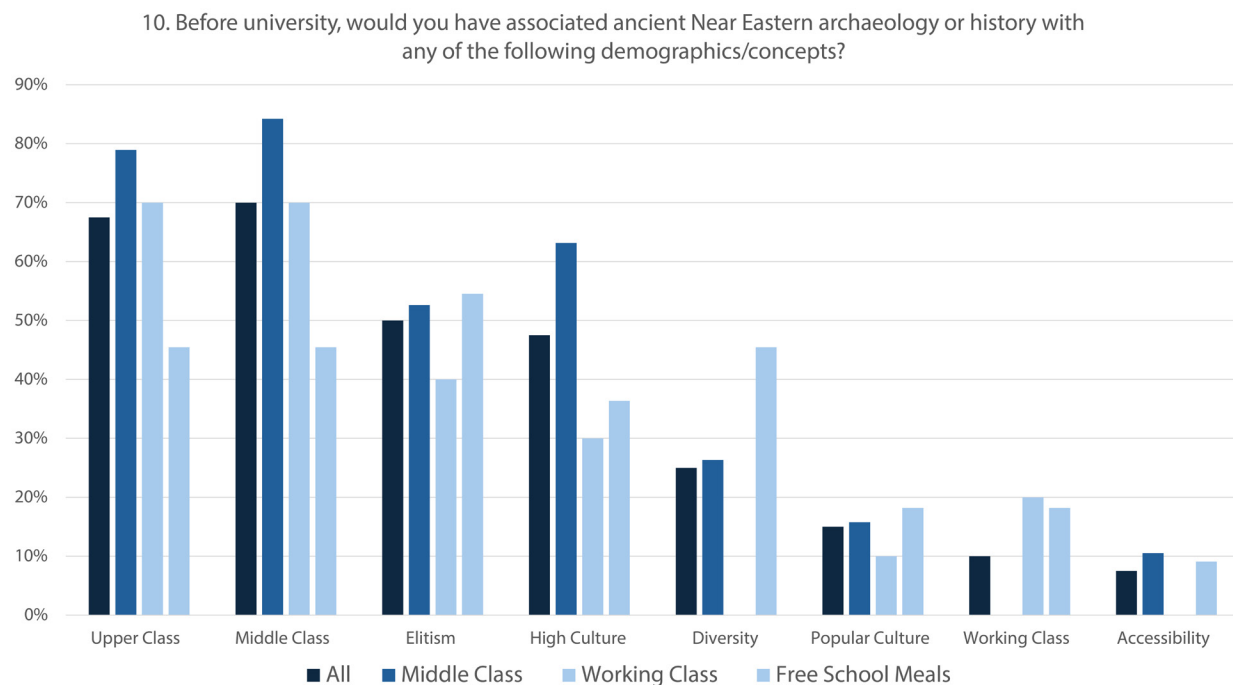


Figure 10. Responses to question 10.

When given free rein to describe persons they would imagine were involved in ANE archaeology and history before university, respondents offer a wide range of answers, though they bunch around affluent white men. The most common socioeconomic descriptor used by respondents who identify as middle class or working class is “upper-class,” whereas the most common socioeconomic descriptor offered by free school meal recipients is “middle class” (Figure 11). Only one (5%) middle class and one (13%) working class respondent specifically identified working class individuals as people who might be involved in the field. Far more detail is offered by the specific free-text responses.

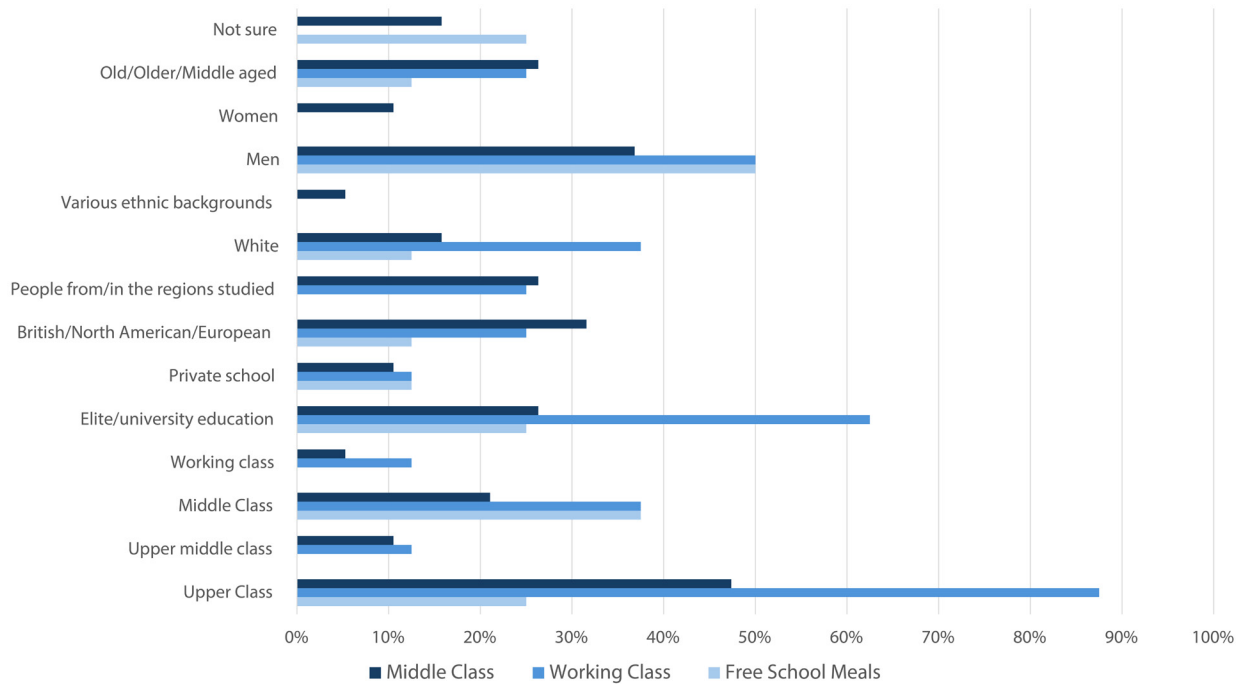


Figure 11. Responses to question 8: “Before university, what type of people would you imagine being involved in ancient Near Eastern archaeology and history? E.g., specifically social classes, genders, educational backgrounds, nationalities, ages, etc.”

After respondents had studied in university departments teaching ANE topics, the perceptions that respondents had developed before higher education have not changed as much as we might hope—and they are least likely to have changed among the least affluent students (Figure 12). Of the students who said that their perceptions had changed (14 [74%] middle class, 5 [50%] working class, and 3 [27%] free school meal recipients), several students reported higher levels of diversity and accessibility than they had anticipated. However, where students clearly describe their classmates or instructors as more diverse than expected, the responses are frequently rather muted. For instance, one working class respondent could only offer that they had “encountered a handful of people with regional accents involved in it,” a concern that reflects widespread prejudice toward regional (as well as ethnic and racial) dialects reported by academics, especially at Russell Group institutions (Crew 2020:71–73). Meanwhile, other respondents qualify their positive impressions of diversity. One respondent, for instance, answers that “archaeology seems to definitely be more diverse in terms of social class. Though there is still some version of elitism in the subject.” Another notes that “the student base is definitely more diverse, however all my lecturers are white all but one of them so far have been male. All but one of them were at least 40,” and another that “while it is still lots of private school people I have realized my ideas about their numbers were misjudged.”

Of the two free school meal recipients (66%) who felt the discipline was more diverse in topics studied than they had anticipated, one specifically contrasted this with its demographic and reading list homogeneity, stating that “although I have witnessed a huge lack of diversity in the archaeologists I have interacted with in class, in recommended readings etc, I have felt very welcomed and surprised by the [diversity] in the topics and depth of research and study material.”

One middle class respondent saw the discipline as less diverse than anticipated. Having stated in question 8 that they had anticipated a “mix of ethnic backgrounds, but predominantly white [and] lower middle [to] upper middle class [with] some working class,” they later responded to question 15 that “those studying it [are] MUCH less diverse than I originally anticipated, and still extremely male dominated (and particularly, those who are financially secure enough, or have been over their lifetime, to consider such a specialization a considered and viable career decision).”

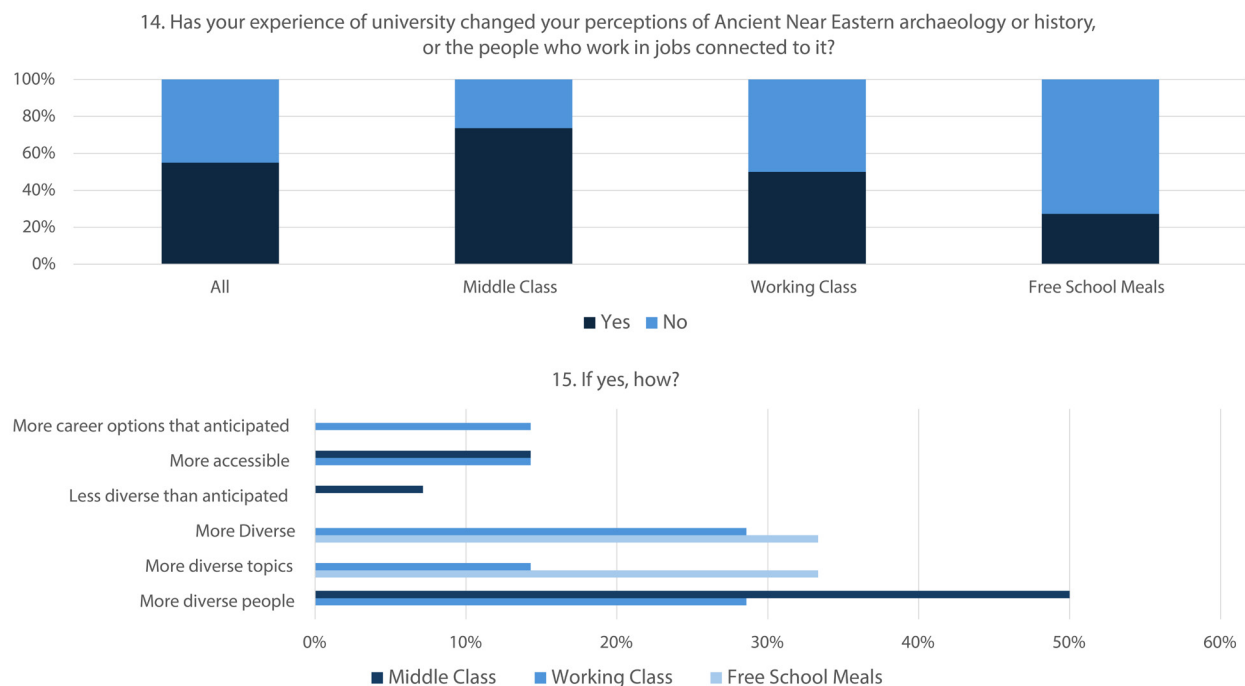


Figure 12. Responses to questions 14 and 15. Some responses refer to unspecific diversity, and it is not clear whether they are describing the diversity of the subject material or the persons participating.

Conclusions

The survey highlights a number of key patterns in both the socioeconomic demographics engaged in ANE archaeology and the perception of the field among undergraduate archaeology students in the UK.

More working class respondents were undertaking ANE study than middle class respondents, but free school meal recipients pursued ANE topics at a much lower rate than either. However, students identifying as working class overall describe their parents and carers as having occupational categories and educational backgrounds significantly higher than UK averages, and these data indicate that respondents currently studying ANE topics in fact come from slightly more affluent, and significantly more highly educated, backgrounds than students not undertaking ANE study, despite their stated identities.

Rather unsurprisingly, pursuing ANE study also correlated with having been familiar with ANE topics before university. This familiarity also split along socioeconomic lines, with the lowest-SES background respondents by far the least likely to have been familiar with ANE subjects.

In terms of perceptions of ANE archaeology, respondents overwhelmingly describe it as being associated with affluence and the elite and, regardless of their stated class identities or socioeconomic background, populated by researchers from wealthier social strata than they themselves occupied. As respondents engaged with the discipline and its practitioners in university contexts, these perceptions were not challenged very often. Potential students of ANE archaeology seem to arrive at a series of push factors that make them feel like outsiders and discourage participation in the field: a lack of familiarity with the subject; career doubts; and unchallenged and unaddressed perceptions of practitioners being elite and affluent.

Next Steps

The pilot study results clearly show correlations between social class and engagement with ANE archaeology that warrant more substantial investigation. The first necessary step is to collect more data from a larger sample, targeting individuals at a variety of career stages, to confirm and expand on the patterns identified here. Additional data would also allow for more nuanced interpretations, and the identification of more specific hurdles experienced by students interested in ANE archaeology.

For instance, nationality was included among the prompts for characteristics that respondents might associate with ANE archaeologists in question 11, but ethnicity was not. Despite this omission, ethnic characteristics were a common category of data given by respondents, and the relationship between these and other characteristics in perceptions of the field is an important direction for future research. Other categories of data that were collected raise interesting questions but did not allow for detailed responses and would benefit from further interrogation. It would be useful, for example, to know more about the specific types of documentary, fictional, or gaming sources that respondents recorded as ways they became familiar with ANE topics, especially amid controversy around pseudo-archaeological documentaries and burgeoning

research on archaeology in computer games, including as outreach and pedagogical tools (e.g., Arbuckle MacLeod 2021; Mol et al. 2017; Reinhard 2018). Additional questions gathering data regarding respondents' experiences of other archaeological subdisciplines would also help to compare and contrast them with ANE in more detail.

Demonstrating patterns with larger samples and more detail will not begin to rectify the issue, however. ANE archaeologists *must* take an active part in changing our demographics. Sol Gamsu (2015) has convincingly argued that widening participation programs have simply supported a handful of less affluent students already likely to achieve top grades, and represent “social alibis” that justify an education system that remains steadfastly elite focused. ANE cannot, therefore, rely on university-level programs and must seek out its own bespoke strategies to address issues in diversity of recruitment and retention, and prioritize pedagogical and outreach work as a matter of urgency.

Appendix: Questionnaire

Consent

This survey is being conducted by Dr. Neil Erskine (Archaeology, University of Glasgow) as part of a project titled *Socioeconomic Diversity amongst Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology Student Cohorts in UK Higher Education*. The project has been reviewed and approved by members of the College of Arts Research Ethics Committee [August 2, 2022 Ref: 100210130].

This project seeks to identify patterns in the socioeconomic backgrounds of archaeology students in UK teaching institutions and identify any contrasts with the backgrounds of those who chose to study ancient Near Eastern topics specifically. The information gathered will provide the basis for a research article and/or funding application in support of a more comprehensive research project addressing ancient Near Eastern archaeology's socioeconomic diversity (or homogeneity) and the potential consequences this has, or should have, for teaching.

This survey is completely anonymous. The link has been circulated around all UK higher education institutions teaching ancient Near Eastern topics in archaeology and no questions ask you to identify your institution or for any other information that could allow your identity to be discerned.

Any queries or concerns can be directed to the lead researcher, Dr. Neil Erskine (neil.erskine@glasgow.ac.uk), the University of Glasgow head of Archaeology, Dr. Kenny Brophy (Kenny.brophy@glasgow.ac.uk), or Uhe university of Glasgow College of Arts ethics officer (arts-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk).

1. Do you consent to your answers being used for research purposes?

- Yes
- No

ANE before University

2. Were you familiar with any ancient Near Eastern topics/societies prior to university?

- Yes
- No

3. If yes, which?

- Answer:

4. Were any ancient Near Eastern topics/societies covered at any point in your school education?

- Yes
- No

5. If yes, which?

- Answer:

6. Other than school, where did your familiarity with ancient Near Eastern topics/societies come from?

- Documentary TV or film
- Fictional TV or film
- Non-fiction books
- Fictional books
- Museums
- Gaming
- Other: answer

7. Before university, what type of people would you imagine being involved in ancient Near Eastern archaeology and history? E.g., specifically social classes, genders, educational backgrounds, nationalities, ages, etc.

- Answer:

8. Did ancient Near Eastern archaeology or history seem like a realistic career option?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

9. Would you have associated ancient Near Eastern archaeology or history with any of the following demographics/concepts?

- Upper class
- Middle class
- Working class
- Elitism
- Accessibility
- Diversity
- “High” culture
- “Popular” culture

ANE at University

10. Are you currently undertaking any classes or research focused on the archaeology or history of the ancient Near East?

- Yes
- No

11. Do you intend to undertake any classes or research focused on the archaeology or history of the ancient Near East at any point during your current degree or during later study?

- Yes
- No

IF NO...

12. Why do you not intend to undertake any classes or research focused on the archaeology or history of the ancient Near East?

- Not interested
- Tried it and didn't enjoy it
- The specific courses offered aren't of interest
- Not relevant to my career plans
- Content feels too unfamiliar
- I didn't think I'd be good at it
- I was nervous about my ability compared to classmates
- Anything else: answer

Current Perceptions

13. Has your experience of university changed your perceptions of ancient Near Eastern archaeology or history, or the people who work in jobs connected to it?

- Yes
- No

14. If yes, how?

- Answer:

Education

15. Did one or more of your parent(s) or guardian(s) undertake any post-secondary education? E.g., professional qualifications/HNC/HND.

- Yes
- No

16. Did one or more of your parent(s)/guardian(s) undertake a bachelor's degree or higher?

- Yes
- No

17. Which type of primary education institution did you attend?

- Fee-paying
- State

18. Which type of secondary education institution did you attend?

- Fee-paying
- State

Economic Background

19. Would you identify as being from a working, middle, or upper class background?

- Working class
- Middle class
- Upper class
- I would not identify with a class background

20. If you attended school in the UK, were you ever eligible for free school meals?

- Yes
- No
- Did not attend school in UK

21. When you were 14 years old, in which category was your household's highest earner employed?

Note: these categories follow those used by the Profiling the Profession so as to allow comparison with their survey of professional archaeologists in the UK. The PtP categories are themselves borrowed from those of the ONS National Statistics Socio-economic Classifications.

- Higher managerial and professional
- Lower managerial and professional
- Intermediate occupations
- Small employers and own account workers
- Lower supervisory and technical
- Semi-routine occupations
- Routine occupations
- Never worked, unemployed, and not elsewhere classified

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Notes

- 1 The problematic label “ancient Near Eastern” is frequently avoided in recent literature in favor of less Eurocentric terms such as “ancient Western Asia” (e.g., Bryce et al. 2009; Pollock and Bernbeck 2018; Ur 2017) but is commonplace in the institutions concerned here and is more familiar to students than its alternatives. Consequently it was used for ease of reference in the survey conducted for this research and is used throughout the text to avoid confusion of terminology.
- 2 The Equality Act 2010 protects race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, being pregnant or on maternity leave, and being married or in a civil partnership. Of these, higher education institutions are required to return data on race/ethnicity, sex, disability, and age for staff and students, and religion or belief for students only (HESA 2022, 2024).
- 3 The Russell Group is an association of 24 self-selecting leading UK universities. The “elite” nature of the Russell Group, and the degree to which the institutions represent a distinct category of universities that can be contrasted with nonmembers, is disputed, but they nevertheless represent the majority of the UK's most academically selective institutions, dominate UK university rankings, and

collectively receive the majority of UK research funding (Boliver 2015; Havergal 2015; Morgan 2014; Russell Group 2024).

- 4 Only POLAR is used here to allow UK-wide comparison, but SIMD data are presented alongside POLAR data in the cited UCAS sources.
- 5 All UK HEIs offering undergraduate degrees with “archaeology” in their title except University Centre Peterborough, which is not included in the UCAS data.
- 6 Many universities touch on ANE topics in courses not specifically focused on them. Here, “institutions providing undergraduate ANE teaching” are defined as universities that have British Association for Near Eastern Archaeology institutional representatives. Those are the Bournemouth University, University of Bradford, University of Cambridge, Durham University, University of East Anglia, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, University of Liverpool, University College London, University of Manchester, University of Oxford, and the University of Reading.
- 7 These universities were Bournemouth, Bradford, Cambridge, Cardiff, Durham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Oxford, Reading, and UCL. Staff from the Universities of Cambridge, Glasgow, Oxford, Liverpool, and Reading confirmed they had circulated the survey.
- 8 Throughout the UK, children are eligible for free school meals if their household is in receipt of Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance, support under the Immigration and Asylum Act, Child Tax Credit, or Universal Credit or Working Tax Credit, provided that household income falls below a nationally variable threshold. Additionally, children in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales are eligible if their household receives income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, or the guaranteed element of Pension Credit; and children in Northern Ireland are also eligible if they have a statement of special educational needs and are designated to need a special diet or board at a special school (Department for Education 2018; Northern Irish Government 2022; Scottish Government 2022; Welsh Government 2022a). Although free school meal eligibility is frequently criticized as being an insufficient and coarse measure that fails to include many deprived children (e.g., Crawford 2018; Gillborn et al. 2013), it is nevertheless accepted that those who are in receipt of free school meals are among the most deprived (Gillborn et al. 2013). Universal free school meals have been implemented in England (Reception and Year 1–2) and Scotland (Primary 1–5), and are being rolled out in Wales. However, these policies were not in place until 2014 in England, 2015 in Scotland (extended to Primary 4 in 2021 and 5 in 2022), and 2022 in Wales, so no university student at the time of the survey was young enough to have received free school meals as part of these schemes.

- 9 In 2018, excluding universal free school meal years, 17% of primary pupils and 14.4% of secondary pupils were eligible for free school meals in Scotland (Learning Directorate 2019), and 29.4% of primary pupils and 39.2% of secondary pupils were eligible in Northern Ireland (Department for Education and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2019, table 7). At the same time, free school meals were available to 15.4% of school pupils in England (Department for Education 2021) and 16.8% in Wales (Welsh Government 2022b). The English and Welsh data do not distinguish between universal free school meal years and the remainder of primary school, or between primary and secondary schools.
- 10 The NS-SEC categories, with 1 being most socioeconomically advantaged and 8 being the least, are (1) higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations; (2) lower managerial, administrative, and professional occupations; (3) intermediate occupations; (4) small employers and own account workers; (5) lower supervisory and technical occupation; (6) semiroutine occupations; (7) routine occupations; and (8) never worked and long-term unemployed.
- 11 These data must be read with the caveat of the significant number of students who do not answer the question or cannot be classified in the system. These students make up some 20% of the total enrolled UK-domiciled students in 2020–21, and the data are only published for UK-domiciled students entering HEI under the age of 21 (Office for Students 2022:28–29).
- 12 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not distinguish between different levels of tertiary education, ranking all professional qualifications, HNDs, HNCs, degrees, and above as level 4 qualification; and census data do not query whether a respondent's parents or carers hold qualifications.
- 13 UK data record occupation or last occupation if retired at the time of census, and UK HEI data record parents/carers' occupations or last occupation if retired at the student's time of entry to HEIs, rather than at age 14.

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