



HISTORIC  
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# INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE POLICY STATEMENT



## INTRODUCTION

The historic environment belongs to all of us. It's part of our everyday lives. It shapes our identity. It tells us about the past, the present – and even points the way to the future.

But what is the historic environment? We see it as everything that has been created by people over time: the tangible and the intangible. It can be a place, an object or an idea. It can be a castle, a ruined abbey or a stone circle; a high street, a colliery or a garden; a book, an instrument – even a song or a piece of music. It's all those things that we've made, all the way up to today.

The historic environment is Scotland's story.

*Heritage For All: HES Corporate Plan 2019 Onwards*

The historic environment is about more than just physical things. It's about those aspects of culture that have shaped our understanding of ourselves throughout our history: informing our perceptions of our place in the world, our relationships with each other, and the places in which we live. We call these aspects intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

This policy statement defines HES's understanding of, and role towards, ICH. It sets out the principles and priorities that will guide our organisation's engagement with ICH in future, and how ICH can inform the decisions we make. By setting out our role in supporting ICH in Scotland, this document will help us to represent the historic environment sector at national-level conversations and initiatives around ICH.

## DEFINING ICH

‘Intangible cultural heritage’ has been defined by UNESCO as ‘the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’<sup>1</sup>. Given its nature as a technical policy term, ICH is often referred to publicly as ‘living culture’ or ‘living heritage’.

At HES we use these concepts interchangeably but use ICH throughout this document to maintain consistency. However, while ‘living culture’ is a useful way of thinking about ICH that is still practiced today, at HES we also have a strong interest in intangible culture that has fallen out of use. Such ‘dormant heritage’ can be just as vital as living heritage to helping us understand the significance and value of buildings, monuments, and landscapes, and can also represent a potential asset for communities. UNESCO identifies five main domains of ICH, which can help us think about what it looks like in practice:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage
- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals and festive events
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- Traditional craftsmanship

You can find out more about these domains and the kinds of practices that fall under them here<sup>2</sup>. In Scotland, there is a wiki-style database of ICH practice which can be found here<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, ‘What is Intangible Cultural Heritage’ - <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/dive&display=domain>

<sup>3</sup> <http://ichscotland.org/>

## CASE STUDY LGBT+ COMMUNITY MAPPING AND PLACEMAKING WITH SCOTLAND'S URBAN PAST

For LGBT History Month 2019, Scotland's Urban Past teamed up with nine community and organisational partners. These included the Scottish Civic Trust, OurStory Scotland and LGBT Health and Wellbeing. The community-led project celebrated places that matter to LGBTQ+ people in Edinburgh and Ayrshire.

Participants talked about places they valued from both the past and present. They explained why they were significant, sharing associated experiences and memories. We captured these intangible values and connections in a community mapping process, creating the final document *Queering the Map of Edinburgh*<sup>4</sup>.

Making new and accessible places and spaces is exactly what young LGBTQ+ people are doing right now. Working with East Ayrshire Council, Kilmarnock Academy and Loudoun Academy on a youth-led project, pupils at Kilmarnock Academy and Loudoun Academy were interviewed about the places that matter to them. The final film shows courageous and confident young people expressing their experiences of setting up LGBTQ+ clubs in their schools<sup>5</sup>. It was inspirational to hear that the spaces, communities and activities celebrated in the this SUP project are helping young people feel accepted, safe and comfortable.

Helping people of all ages record their heritage has been central to SUP, and it has been important to us to capture the wider attitudes of society towards the spaces that matter to different communities. We hope projects like *Queering the Map of Edinburgh* – with its tangible and intangible heritage – can help to shape our understanding of heritage in future.

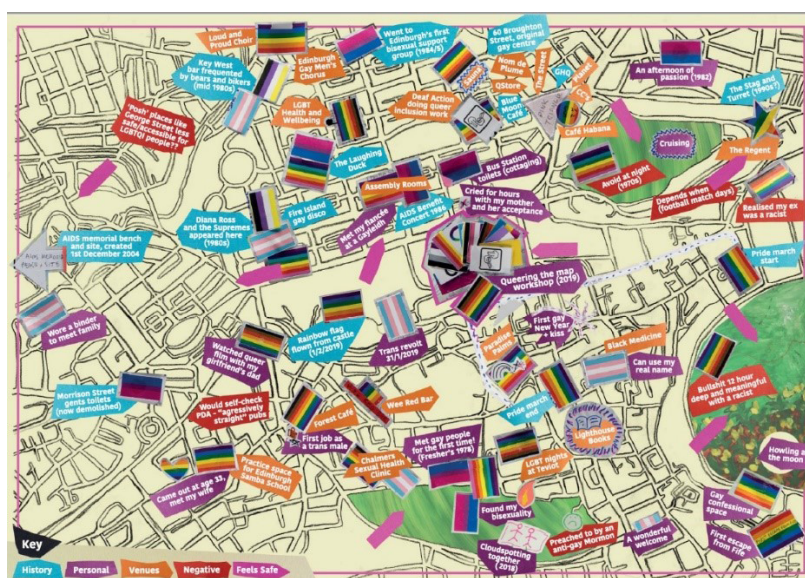


Image design: [www.hollysummerson.com](http://www.hollysummerson.com)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/queering-the-map-of-edinburgh/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh8P3Sj3fWo&list=PLjP3TtHXSffWzrASuWNAUpGSvzu7BaHfx&index=20>

## THE VALUE OF ICH

*ICH provides a platform to understand and celebrate our identity and place in the world; it promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity*

ICH is dynamic, and is constantly reimagined, reinvented, and recreated by people in response to changing circumstances. At its heart, ICH is held by communities or social groups, is passed down from generation to generation, and acts as a reference point between our lives in the present day and those of our forebears. Through these connections ICH can help us to consider cross-cutting issues such as gender, race, or environmental heritage in a more holistic way. The ability of intangible culture to help us engage with such themes is one reason that the right to participate in cultural life is identified by the UN as a fundamental human right<sup>6</sup>. These rights are valued internationally as the bedrock of creativity and sustainable development; encompassing not just economic development but an individual's ability to develop socially, intellectually, morally, and spiritually – contributing to what we now term 'wellbeing'.

Scotland's National Performance Framework recognises these links through its aim to ensure that Scotland is 'creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and widely enjoyed'. ICH is also a significant driver of tourism to Scotland, with 33% of people who visit Scotland inspired to come by our history and culture<sup>7</sup>. Thus, although the United Kingdom - and by extension Scotland - is not a signatory to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, there are strong reasons for HES to engage with ICH.

In recognition of the plurality of Scotland's cultures, and the importance of embracing the contribution made by those from elsewhere to our nation's cultural life, we follow the lead set by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) and refer to 'ICH in Scotland' rather than 'Scottish ICH' because we feel this concept best respects the diversity of Scotland's communities<sup>8</sup>. However, following ethical guidelines set down by UNESCO, at HES we give consideration to ICH only when it is compatible with human rights, and when it does not compromise the principles of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, or of sustainable development<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Articles 19 and 27 of the 2001 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>7</sup> *Visit Scotland Visitor Survey 2015 and 2016*.

<sup>8</sup> MGS are currently the only Scottish organisation accredited as an expert NGO adviser to UNESCO on the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. You can find out more about how MGS work with ICH at <https://www.museumsgalleriescotland.org.uk/projects/intangible-cultural-heritage/>

<sup>9</sup> Article 2.1 of the UNESCO 2003 Convention.

## CASE STUDY

### MEET YOUR MAKER PROGRAMME: INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AS CREATIVE INSPIRATION

Creative learning programmes offer a unique opportunity to bring together diverse participants to use the historic environment as the inspiration for new work. These events introduce creative practitioners and learners to inspirational source material, new mediums of work, and new design skills. ICH is interwoven throughout these events, with the resulting work often producing new interpretations of the stories, characters, myths and legends that lurk in the shadows of physical places.

Meet Your Maker is one of these programmes: a collaboration between HES, Craft Scotland and education partners including high schools, further education, youth work and adult education. Using heritage sites as inspiration, the programme brings together practising contemporary makers and learners to co-design new work. Participation supports creative practitioners to enhance their teaching skills, provides learners with opportunities to use new mediums, and helps HES to broaden the social and creative reach of our heritage resources.

In a recent Meet Your Maker project, fine art students from the University of the Highlands and Islands worked with makers to produce portfolio work inspired by Elgin Cathedral<sup>10</sup>. This was showcased in an exhibition at Moray School of Art. While the stones and carvings of the cathedral were present, it was intangible heritage that really came to the fore in the artwork re-imagined through a contemporary lens for today's audience: the stories of past inhabitants and local events.

In re-using, re-interpreting and re-imagining the stories, characters, art and traditional skills associated with these special places, we create new intangible culture as well as celebrating existing practices. Symbolic of the communities who produce it, the art provides contemporary manifestations, a snapshot of the cultural now, which in the future could provide an understanding of the cultural links between community and heritage in the early 21st Century.



<sup>10</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW2Ye8t9obM&list=PLjP3TtHXSffUy79WR9tiKj4\\_rYdh43YL2&index=22](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW2Ye8t9obM&list=PLjP3TtHXSffUy79WR9tiKj4_rYdh43YL2&index=22)

## THREATS AND WIDER CONTEXT

As 'living culture' ICH is constantly evolving. This itself is not necessarily a threat: we might think that a culture that doesn't change is at more risk of dying out than one that is capable of evolution or adaptation. Nevertheless, ICH practices face several challenges that threaten their continuing existence, many of which are growing in severity. These include:

- Negative attitudes, cultural hostility or intolerance
- Decontextualisation
- Weakened practice and transmission
- Cultural globalisation and cultural appropriation
- Loss of objects or systems
- Economic or climactic pressures

Because ICH is fragile, and dependent on communities of interest and practice for its survival, there is a strong rationale for public bodies to support and empower those communities to safeguard their intangible culture. However, ICH can also be contested, and can be used to assert the rights of one group against another. Thus, we need to set out clear and transparent criteria to guide our engagement with ICH, and to establish clear organisational remits and responsibilities to ensure strategic alignment and prevent duplication of effort.

## WHAT DOES ICH MEAN FOR HES?

Our Place in Time (*OPiT*), the historic environment strategy for Scotland, recognises that the historic environment is a combination of physical things (tangible) and those aspects we cannot see – stories, traditions and concepts (intangible). ICH already guides aspects of our work at HES – from the Statements of Significance we produce to the policies we create to manage change in Scotland's historic environment. But we recognise that we need to integrate ICH more strongly into our work if we are to fulfil the vision of *OPiT*.

As *OPiT* makes clear, ICH is of primary importance to HES through its connection to tangible culture – to a building, a historic park or garden, or a landscape, and the skills associated with the creation and maintenance of these. After all, a building or monument only has significance in so far as it has a meaning associated with it. Whether this is a story about the history of a building and the events associated with it; an explanation as to why an architectural style, manufacturing activity, or traditional skill is important or unique; or a description about the research potential of physical remains, we can only understand the tangible through reference to its intangible aspects, and vice versa.

Understanding the value of ICH in this way can help us understand where UNESCO's five domains of ICH most closely connect to the historic environment:

- Oral traditions and expressions link people to place, give us new ways of seeing the world and our heritage, and connect us through reference to common experiences or shared landscapes
- Performing arts give expression to our identities and relationships, creating new ways for us to engage with each other, and producing new meanings, identities, and sense of place
- Social practices and festivals help us understand how people in the present-day see their surrounding environment, and create collective opportunities for debating, celebrating, and imagining past, present, and future
- Knowledge and practices concerning the universe are vital to interpreting the significance of historic monuments, landscapes and collections, and people's relationships with them in the present day
- Traditional crafts and the skills and knowledge associated with them are vital to conserving the historic environment – for instance, traditional building techniques need to be kept alive if we are to maintain the character of historic properties in a useable state, while the maintenance and operation of industrial heritage is only made possible by keeping alive the intangible skills associated with them.

ICH is therefore an integral part of the historic environment. But what role do we at HES have to play in promoting and safeguarding ICH in Scotland? We are not the only organisation with an interest in living heritage, and there is currently no one lead body in Scotland responsible for ICH. MGS, Creative Scotland, and Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland (TRACS) all have important roles to play alongside us in promoting ICH. Universities, local history societies, and professional institutions also do much to record and share ICH practices across Scotland. To ensure the best use of limited resources and to prevent duplication of effort, we must therefore identify where our organisation has most value to bring to ICH, and where others are better placed to take the lead.

We have identified the following areas as those where we already make a significant contribution to ICH in Scotland. Although we already engage with ICH in each area, we recognise that we need to be more consistent and focused if we are to promote and safeguard living heritage. The 'Priorities' section further in this document sets out how we plan to do this.

### **Capturing and recording**

- Through our survey, recording, and archiving work, we help to capture associations, work or social practices connected to built heritage, thus helping us to safeguard intangible culture.



### **Cultural significance**

- Through our research, regulatory and conservation work, we foster and promote an inclusive understanding of the cultural significance of Scotland's historic environment and the properties in our care. An understanding of cultural significance, that incorporates both tangible and intangible values, informs conservation and management decisions, and provides content for interpretation and learning programmes.

### **Funding**

- Every year we distribute around £14.5m worth of funding to projects that help to protect, promote, and conserve Scotland's historic environment. These grants help us to support traditional skills and the use of traditional materials, and engage communities with their heritage, thus helping to keep ICH practices and skills alive.

### **Skills**

- We work with schools, colleges, universities, industry groups, forums, practitioners and communities to promote, support, and develop traditional skills across Scotland. This helps us to ensure the sustainability of skills and that related intangible work practices are valued and passed down from one generation to the next.

### **Learning and Outreach**

- We engage diverse audiences with the historic environment through learning access schemes, resources and programmes. This enables learners at all stages of their lifelong learning journey to explore their heritage, develop skills and knowledge and inspire creativity. Through meaningful engagement we can help support learners' access and understand intangible cultural heritage and their role in sustaining it. As a result, ICH can be used to support wider learning and social outcomes.

### **Interpretation and Events**

- Through the stories we tell in our on- and off-site interpretation, and the events we participate in, we help to keep alive stories, songs, skills and traditions connected to places and people.

### **Managing Change**

- Through our regulatory and conservation work, we seek to manage change to the historic environment and ensure good decision-making regarding its future. By making robust and transparent decisions that incorporate both tangible and intangible values, we help to ensure a sustainable future for Scotland's historic environment.

### **Communities**

- We work with a range of community groups, from local history societies interested to learn more about their local area to community development trusts looking to take on and run historic buildings. We also support local intangible culture through our retail offer, with the products we stock in our shops reflecting the traditions and culture of their surrounding communities.

## CASE STUDY TRADITIONAL MATERIALS AND SKILLS: HOW HES GRANTS SUPPORT ICH

Traditional building skills are an aspect of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) crucial to the future of Scotland's built heritage. However, many traditional skills are at risk of dying out because they are not being passed on, or because there is a lack of incentives for younger generations to choose them as a career path.

One of the aims of Historic Environment Scotland's grant programmes is to help combat the decline in traditional skills. The Historic Environment Support Fund (HESF) is our smallest grant scheme and provides support for one-off heritage events, small projects and traditional skills work and training. Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust, for instance, received a HESF grant of £40,000 in 2018 for 'Building Skills - Inspiring Futures', which aims to address the traditional building skills gap by offering vocational training to academically disengaged schoolchildren, adults with mental health difficulties, and those within the criminal justice system. Having successfully delivered a total of 60 training placements in 2018 and 2019, the project has provided significant social and economic benefit whilst helping to keep traditional masonry skills alive in Scotland.

Along with skills, specific building techniques or styles are important intangible elements of the historic environment. How skills or building materials are used is certainly vital to understanding the character or significance of a building. Like the skills they are associated with, however, these techniques are themselves vulnerable. For instance, one tradition considered to be at risk is the craft of building dry stone walls or dykes, which dates back three and a half millennia. HES grants help to keep these techniques and styles alive and in use. On North Ronaldsay, Eday and Papa Westray, for instance, the North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme has been supported through our Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) to deliver several courses on dry stone walking as part of its Traditional Skills and Knowledge Development agenda.



*'Cassie' (traditional stone-built sear defence) training course in Papa Westray as part of the North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme, October 2019.*

## PRINCIPLES

At HES, our engagement with ICH will be guided by the following set of principles:

### **The tangible and intangible are inextricably linked**

- ICH is integral to our understanding of the historic environment. We will therefore ensure that ICH is mainstreamed across our work. When we make decisions about the historic environment, we will ensure that they are informed by an inclusive understanding of heritage, that includes the intangible as well as the tangible.

### **Community Benefit**

- We recognise that ICH is first and foremost about the communities and groups that create, maintain, and transmit it. We are committed to empowering and strengthening Scotland's communities to secure the benefits ICH can bring for both present and future generations, and to collaborating with communities to help them understand and share their ICH. If our work with communities results in income-generating opportunities, we will ensure that the communities themselves benefit from this.

### **Partnership and collaboration**

- We recognise that we are not the only organisation in Scotland with an interest in ICH. To make the most of the interest and expertise that exists across Scotland and beyond, wherever possible we will look to work in partnership rather than undertaking work solely by ourselves.

### **Safeguarding and Sharing expertise**

- Our organisation and its predecessors have been surveying, recording, protecting and presenting Scotland's historic environment for over 100 years. Through the crafts professionals we train and employ we also contribute to the safeguarding and use of ICH practices related to traditional skills and materials. We are committed to celebrating and sharing this wealth of expertise to help people to engage with ICH. However, working consistently with ICH will also require us to adopt new methodologies and procedures. We are committed to learning from others who have experience of working with ICH, and ensuring we share this knowledge with our staff, partners, and the communities we work with.

### **Inclusive**

- We recognise that ICH encompasses a diverse array of activities from a variety of communities. We will respect this diversity, and champion inclusive approaches to ICH across our work.

### **Respect and tolerance**

- Each community, group, or individual should be free to assess the value of its own cultural heritage. However, respect and tolerance are the bedrocks of our engagement with ICH, and we will not work with ICH if it will cause harm to others or violate fundamental human rights. When we make decisions relating to ICH, we will recognise any contested values that exist, and be open and transparent about the criteria that guide our assessments.

## PRIORITIES

Our aim is to help safeguard and promote ICH in Scotland. To help us achieve this we have identified priority areas where we can best target our activity and resources. These priority areas are supported by cross-cutting themes that will help us improve how we work as an organisation.



Our priorities regarding ICH are to:

### Mainstream

- We will mainstream ICH across our work and ensure that it is appropriately represented in our survey and recording, archives, learning offer, and grants programmes, and in the interpretation and events we run at our sites.

### Skills

- We will work with sector bodies and educational institutions to identify at risk skills and investigate how our activities could be used to support any skills or traditions deemed to be at risk. We will encourage and support the transmission and dissemination of traditional skills, knowledge and practices through proactive policies and initiatives, and ensure that we recognise and record any intangible cultural heritage practised by the crafts people we employ.

### **Partnerships and Communities**

- We will work with partners to align efforts across Scotland relating to ICH, and to establish clear remits for each organisation. Together we will empower communities to use, celebrate, and share their ICH with the world.

### **Managing Change**

- When we make decisions about the historic environment, whether through our regulatory role or in the conservation decisions we make about the sites we care for, we will ensure that ICH is considered alongside any other values that might be affected by potential changes.

## **CROSS-CUTTING**

### **People and Culture**

- We will ensure that our staff have the skills and confidence to work with ICH, and will develop clear and transparent criteria to guide our engagement with living culture. If necessary, we will look to bring in new forms of expertise to support our work, and pioneer new methodologies and procedures to help us.

### **Research and Innovation**

- Working with ICH will require not just new methodologies, but will require us to address gaps in our knowledge and develop new and innovative approaches. When we conduct research or pilot new ways of working, we will work with communities as well as with academics and other public bodies, and follow participatory and co-production approaches.

### **Education and Learning**

- We will ensure ICH is embedded within our learning, public and community engagement resources and programmes. This will enable ICH themes and content to reach a wider and more inclusive audience, including people who might have no prior knowledge or experience with it.

### **Language and Associated Practices**

- We recognise that language is a vehicle for the transmission of ICH, and that languages are vital to understanding the culture from which they spring. We acknowledge the place of Gaelic language and culture as a distinct and unique part of Scotland's history and living culture, and the association of Gaelic and Scots with many of the properties and archives we have in our care. In line with our Gaelic Language Plan we will continue to encourage a greater understanding of the role of Gaelic within our historic environment, and will seek to initiate new activities that use ICH to further enhance the promotion of Gaelic and Scots.

## TAKING OUR WORK FORWARD

ICH is a core component of Heritage for All, our Corporate Plan. Across the life of this plan, our success in working with ICH will be measured by a key performance indicator – ‘evidence that our work is safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Scotland’. To help direct our focus as our engagement with ICH develops, we will create yearly action plans and will embed ICH in our forward planning. This process will be ‘live’ and will evolve along with our work and partnerships and may be supported by additional indicators of success.

### CASE STUDY

#### HOW CLIMATE CHANGE AFFECTS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ITS LINKS TO THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Feeding reindeer in northern Sweden might sound like a benign activity, but it is increasingly a story about climate change, indigenous people and their intangible cultural heritage. Through our involvement in Adapt Northern Heritage, we are working with partners in Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Russia and Sweden to explore how climate change affects the historic environment, and what local communities can do to adapt their historic places to these impacts. For one group, the Sami people of Russia’s Murmansk Oblast, northern Finland and mid- to northern Scandinavia, climate change is already affecting their way of life by affecting their reindeer herds.

Animals are an intrinsic part of Sámi life and cultural practices. The Sami follow the reindeer herds every year, occasionally driving them to find new sources of food. But, due to climate change, wetter climates are resulting in more rain and less snow. When this rain freezes the reindeer find it hard to reach the lichen they feed on. As a result, century’s old drove routes are being disrupted as the Sami are forced to find new sources of food, while the reindeer herds themselves are being weakened through the



Along with impacting on the landscape, climatic change is also affecting other aspects of the Sami's heritage. Sami camps consist of make-shift shelters, constructed in the form of tipis made from wooden branches, earth and grasses. These structures require frequent maintenance to remain in good repair, but due to the shift in reindeer migratory patterns many now lie unused. This change is further compounded because many Sami are shifting to staying in newer buildings. As a result, the knowledge and skills that lie behind the creation and maintenance of these traditional camps are falling out of use.

How might Scotland be affected by similar changes in climate? Several aspects of our intangible culture are already at risk. Curling, for instance, used to be a common outdoor winter sport, and is believed to have originated in Scotland. Many Scottish estates have ponds that were created specifically for curling, while Duddingston Loch in Edinburgh was home to the world's first ice skating club. But with climate change causing winter temperatures to rise, these bodies of water rarely freeze now, and curling and skating must be done indoors. What intangible heritage do we lose when such practices change, and how does it affect our appreciation of the historic environment? These questions will be more frequently asked of us as the impacts of climate change are felt in the coming years.





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We want to make sure Scotland's heritage is cherished, understood, shared and enjoyed with pride by everyone.

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