

Our Equality Outcomes 2025-29



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Introduction

Our Equality Outcomes reflect our commitment to creating an inclusive, equitable environment that seeks to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations.

We recognise the transformative power of equality as an instrument of change and are dedicated to achieving a cultural shift that not only redefines our organisation, but also aims to make a long-term, positive impact for Scotland's communities and historic environment.

Through our national strategy, **Our Past, Our Future** (OPOF) – the strategy for Scotland's historic environment, we demonstrate the importance of Scotland's heritage as a national asset, one that generates employment, strengthens communities, and connects us to Scotland's past. The strategy underscores the critical role our historic environment plays in transitioning to net zero and fostering thriving local communities.

Heritage For All, our corporate plan furthers this vision by committing to inclusive participation, building partnerships across sectors, and focusing on impactful, people-centred outcomes. Our priorities for the coming years around caring for Scotland's heritage, skills and learning, people and places, climate change, and inclusion and resilience set a clear path forward. Together, we strive for a Scotland where heritage is inclusive, accessible, and cherished for generations to come.

Assistant Ranger, Gordon Smith sharing stories and facts about Holyrood Park



Development process of Equality Outcomes through co-creation

Since publishing our 2021-2025 Equality Outcomes, we have embarked on a continuous improvement journey, recognising both the strengths and challenges of our large organisation within a complex post-COVID landscape.

This period, marked by the cost-of-living crisis and shifting demographics, pushed us to identify gaps in the sector, particularly in understanding equality and inclusion.

Our focus became clear: to empower people, build trust with communities, and address the absence of voices often missing in the heritage sector.

To address these needs, we initiated collaborative processes aimed at co-creating a shared vision of equality and inclusion. This required building robust internal and external partnerships to enable a culture of mutual respect and a balanced power dynamic. Engaging broadly across our organisation through questionnaires, forums, and our Equality Champions, we sought a wide range of perspectives and insights.

We also engaged with underrepresented communities through accessible site visits, where participants could openly share feedback on barriers to inclusion, provide insight into our objectives, and offer ideas for community involvement in the historic environment.

This process has profoundly shaped our Equality Outcomes and Action Plan, which we consider a collaborative achievement made by people, for people. The voices of marginalised communities will guide the 2025-29 Equality Outcomes and Action Plan, fostering stronger, more inclusive connections between underrepresented groups and the heritage sector. Through such meaningful engagement, we are working to ensure that all feel represented and valued. For a detailed overview, please see our internal and external engagement reports, which provide in-depth insights and findings.

Colleagues taking part in 'A Day to Make a Difference Together' at Bridgend Farmhouse



Understanding inequalities to guide our Equality Outcomes

Heritage plays a significant role in enhancing individual and community wellbeing. A recent report by Historic England shows that visiting local heritage sites, such as monuments, historic parks, or listed buildings, can increase happiness and subjective wellbeing by up to 93%¹.

This impact, valued at approximately £29 billion annually in England, highlights how heritage experiences not only promote life satisfaction but can also help prevent long-term mental health issues. Heritage sites offer a neutral space that fosters social connections, bringing people together across diverse backgrounds, which is essential in supporting emotional and social wellbeing. Engaging with Scotland's historic environment has been shown to enhance individual wellbeing, fostering a sense of identity and community connection².

In Scotland, social and economic inequalities affect wellbeing and access to resources, with over one million people living in poverty. These disparities are felt most acutely by certain groups, including lone-parent families, minority ethnic groups, and disabled people, highlighting the need for a targeted, intersectional approach to address persistent inequalities in areas such as housing, employment, and health³.

In developing our 2025-29 Equality Outcomes, we have been committed to a people-centred approach that humanises our policies, practices, and procedures to create real, impactful change. By focusing on socio-economic diversity through an intersectional lens, we aim to address the unique challenges faced by individuals with overlapping identities, ensuring our Equality Outcomes reflect Scotland's diverse communities. Through these efforts, we seek to make a positive impact on people's lives and create inclusive, equitable spaces for all.



Family day out at Dumbarton Castle

1 <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/research-shows-heritage-boosts-your-wellbeing/>

2 [The Links between Scotland's Historic Environment and Wellbeing | HES](#)

3 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/poverty-in-scotland-2024>

Aligning Society, Services, and People with our Equality Goals

Through learning and understanding, informed by comprehensive internal and external insights, we have established three key themes for our 2025-29 Equality Outcomes: Empowering community participation and addressing inequalities, Equity in Access, and Inclusive Workforce and Leadership Opportunities.

These themes are structured across three core areas – **Our Society**, **Our Services**, and **Our People** – ensuring alignment between our equality objectives and organisational goals. Our Equality Outcomes for the next four years are:

Our Society

We empower underrepresented communities in shaping change and create opportunities promoting equality and justice.

Our Services

We work to remove barriers to access, creating meaningful engagement opportunities for everyone, regardless of who they are.

Our People

We continue to strive for a truly diverse and inclusive culture where people feel valued and can be their true self.



Edinburgh's Muslim Scouts visit Stirling Castle

Implementation and measuring Equality Outcomes

To guide our progress in achieving Equality Outcomes, we have developed a structured approach with clear accountability and monitoring mechanisms.

Our 2025-29 Equality Outcomes are detailed in tables that specify the inequalities we aim to address, the general equality duties we fulfil, and the indicators by which we will measure our progress. These outcomes also reflect consultation findings and are designed to embed equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into our annual strategic, operational, and directorate planning processes.

Every April, we will produce an Annual Equality Action Plan that outlines specific steps, tracks progress, and enables us to adjust to account for unforeseen events at national and international levels where necessary.

Our Executive Leadership Team shares the responsibility for embedding EDI into our Operating Plan and Directorate Plans, and other projects and initiatives. Each equality outcome is overseen by a Director:

- **Our Society:** External Relations and Partnerships
- **Our Services:** Marketing and Engagement, and Heritage
- **Our People:** People

The HES Board provides oversight and scrutiny, ensuring that equality impacts are considered in all corporate decision-making. The People Committee, a sub-committee of the HES Board, chaired by a Board member and attended by the People Director, oversees the people element of equalities with quarterly reviews of our progress.

To maintain transparency and accountability, we will publish biennial progress reports on these outcomes. Our next formal review and progress report is due by 30 April 2027. This report will include relevant equality monitoring data, aligning with our public sector duties.



Children at Doors Open Day at the Engine Shed

Reporting and reviewing Equality Outcomes

We have established a cross-Directorate, coordinated approach to develop our yearly Equality Action Plan, encouraging colleagues and teams across the organisation to actively participate in its creation and implementation. This ensures that the plan is reflective of diverse perspectives and aligned with our strategic goals.

The Equality Action Plan undergoes quarterly reviews, enabling us to assess progress, address challenges, and make necessary adjustments. A final review is conducted annually to evaluate the overall impact and inform future planning. These reviews are supported by updates from the People Committee and input from our Equality Champions, ensuring alignment with our commitment to EDI.

In terms of reporting, we produce a biennial progress report that includes equality monitoring data and pay gap data, ensuring transparency and accountability. This report, in line with our public sector duties, highlights our achievements, progress, and areas for further development, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.



External Relations and Partnerships Directorate Forum

Equality Outcomes and Action Plan: **Accountability and Progress Indicators**

Our Society

What is the inequality that we want to address?

In this outcome, we aim to address the historic underrepresentation and exclusion of marginalised groups in Scotland's heritage. Communities such as minority ethnic groups, disabled people, socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and LGBT+ communities have traditionally had limited visibility, engagement, and influence within historic environments. This lack of representation not only impacts these communities' sense of belonging but also limits their access to the cultural and economic benefits that heritage spaces can provide.

Outcome

We empower underrepresented communities in shaping change and creating opportunities promoting equality and justice.

We are committed to creating inclusive spaces that honour diversity and promote justice, ensuring that all communities, especially underrepresented groups, feel welcomed and respected. By centring our environments around people and empowering communities to participate in decision-making processes, we foster a sense of belonging and ownership. This approach encourages diverse perspectives, addresses historic inequalities, and promotes equality and justice.

General equality duties

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations



Launch of 'Nzira Yeparuware' at Edinburgh Castle

Evidence to support the equality outcome

Community Feedback and Consultation

Findings:

Feedback gathered through our consultation processes with community groups and advocacy organisations highlighted that many individuals feel alienated from heritage sites and often do not see their histories or identities represented. Participants expressed a desire for spaces that feel inclusive and for narratives that reflect diverse experiences and contributions¹.

Wellbeing Impact of Cultural Engagement:

Evidence from studies, including reports by Historic England², demonstrates a strong link between heritage engagement and individual wellbeing. Yet, without equitable access, many individuals from underrepresented groups miss out on these mental health and social cohesion benefits. For instance, the 93% increase in subjective wellbeing tied to cultural engagement in heritage sites underscores the need for all communities to feel welcome and included.

Socio-Economic Barriers to Participation:

Socio-economic challenges, such as limited disposable income, time constraints, and geographic location, and access to affordable transport further hinder equitable access. These barriers are particularly significant in rural areas and among low-income groups, making it essential to address these obstacles to ensure all communities can engage fully with Scotland's heritage spaces³.

Key strategies, plans and initiatives

- [Our Past, Our Future](#)
- [Heritage For All](#)
- [Skills Investment Plan \(SIP\) for Scotland's Historic Environment](#)
- [Research Strategy](#)
- [Youth Action Plan](#)



A group of young people outside Trinity House

1 Historic Environment Scotland, 'Report on External Community Group Engagement for Equality Outcomes 2025-2029'

2 <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/research-shows-heritage-boosts-your-wellbeing/>

3 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/poverty-in-scotland-2024>

Actions

All Directorates will identify equalities activities to deliver this outcome annually in line with the annual operating planning process between 2025-29.

What	Who is responsible?
Develop a Community Engagement Framework to empower HES colleagues in building meaningful connections with underrepresented communities, thoughtfully addressing their distinct needs and perspectives.	External Relations and Partnerships/Strategy and Policy
Undertake research initiatives focused on uncovering and highlighting underrepresented stories and histories.	External Relations and Partnerships/Strategy and Policy
Expand and diversify grant offerings to reach previously underrepresented communities, ensuring equitable access to funding opportunities.	External Relations and Partnerships/Strategy and Policy/Grants
Drive progress by advancing sustainable tourism practices and enhancing accessibility for all.	External Relations and Partnerships/Cultural Assets
Support ongoing projects in the heritage sector with a strong focus on equity, diversity and inclusion. Collaborate with heritage and grassroot organisations to identify areas of action and work with heritage organisations to support delivery.	External Relations and Partnerships/Strategy and Policy
Continue to implement a Gaelic Language Plan to promote the use, visibility, and integration of Gaelic across HES sites and communications, supporting cultural heritage and language preservation.	External Relations and Partnerships/Strategy and Policy
Implement the sector-wide Skills Investment Plan to support local economies, improve community wellbeing, and empower individuals through practical skills that drive sustainable heritage preservation and positive community impact.	External Relations and Partnerships/Strategy and Policy
Develop targeted outreach plan to attract diverse volunteers that specifically aims to engage underrepresented groups. This plan will utilise various communication channels, such as social media, community partnerships, and local events, to effectively promote volunteer opportunities and highlight the benefits of participation.	External Relations and Partnerships/Volunteer Development
Support HES (and HES partnered) initiatives through fundraising feasibility processes such as the 'fundraising pipeline' where we will confirm and encourage alignment with our accessibility and inclusivity goals. We will ensure that the funders we apply to also reflect these goals and values.	External Relations and Partnerships/Development

What	Who is responsible?
Support the sector by sharing best practices, resources, and knowledge to promote equity and inclusivity. This action involves creating engaging digital content and tactile resources that enhance learning and sensory experiences, thereby strengthening community ties and fostering a collaborative approach to addressing societal injustices.	External Relations and Partnerships/Strategy and Policy
Establish a collaborative accessibility/inclusion working group of heritage sector representatives to develop best practices for enhancing accessibility and inclusivity. This framework will provide strategies and resources to help organisations improve access for underrepresented communities and encourage ongoing collaboration.	External Relations and Partnerships/Strategy and Policy



Volunteers at the Spectacular Jousting event, Linlithgow Palace

Our Services

What is the inequality that we want to address?

The inequality we aim to address is the limited and often inequitable access to heritage services, programmes, and resources for certain communities. Barriers – both visible and invisible – prevent marginalised groups from engaging fully with Scotland's heritage. These can include physical inaccessibility, lack of culturally relevant programmes, limited digital access, and unintentional bias in service delivery. Our goal is to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background, identity, ability or personal circumstances, have equal access to our heritage services and can participate in Scotland's historic environment.

Outcome

Our Services: We work to remove barriers to access, creating meaningful engagement opportunities for everyone, regardless of who they are.

We ensure fair and equitable access to our services, programmes, and resources by identifying and removing systemic barriers to participation, making certain that everyone, regardless of background or personal circumstances, can engage meaningfully with our shared heritage.

General equality duties

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

Ethan Young enjoying a day out at Stirling Castle



Evidence to support the Equality Outcome

Consultation Feedback on Service

Accessibility:

Feedback from community engagement and consultations has highlighted that some of our services and programmes of activity are seen as less accessible and relevant by underrepresented groups. Respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds shared that current programmes often lack cultural inclusivity, with limited representation of their identities and histories. Additionally, the absence of interpretation in their community languages can make these programmes feel exclusionary. Individuals with varying abilities noted physical and sensory barriers that limit their participation, underscoring the need for more accessible environments and inclusive service design.

Digital Divide and Accessibility:

The shift toward digital engagement in heritage has created new accessibility issues. While digital access can broaden engagement, individuals in lower-income households and older adults often lack access to high-speed internet, digital devices, or digital literacy. This digital divide limits the ability of these groups to engage fully with online heritage resources and virtual programmes.

Access Disparities in Heritage Participation:

Data from previous surveys and reports by HES indicates that certain groups have lower engagement levels with heritage. Barriers such as the cost of admission, lack of accessible facilities, and limited transport options disproportionately affect people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, disabled individuals, and rural communities.

Key strategies, plans and initiatives

- [Historic Environment Policy Scotland](#)
- [Making Sense of Scotland - Our Framework for Outreach and Learning](#)
- [Designations](#)
- [Grants criteria](#)
- [Skills Investment Plan \(SIP\) for Scotland's Historic Environment](#)



British Sign Language interpreters, Gordon Hay and John Hay, outside Edinburgh Castle

Actions

All Directorates will identify equalities activities to deliver this outcome annually in line with the annual operating planning process between 2025-29.

What	Who is responsible?
Develop and implement community outreach initiatives and access schemes targeting underrepresented groups to promote participation in services and programmes.	Marketing and Engagement/ Learning & Inclusion
Continue to implement initiatives such as 'Historic Sundays', providing free or discounted access to our sites for individuals and families with low incomes.	Marketing and Engagement/ Sales & Marketing
Develop additional targeted opportunities to ensure inclusive access and address financial barriers, fostering wider community engagement with heritage.	Marketing and Engagement/ Sales & Marketing
Through the brand development project, we are embarking on a transformative journey to reposition the organisation with more warmth, emotion and inclusivity, staying true to our vision of Heritage For All.	Marketing and Engagement/ Sales & Marketing
Continue to share blogs and stories across social media to highlight underrepresented voices and histories in the historic landscape. Use these stories to raise awareness of diversity in our shared heritage, with a focus on observances like Black History Month, LGBT+ History Month, South Asian Heritage Month, Disability History Month, Gypsy and Traveller History Month, and others.	Marketing and Engagement/ Communications
Conduct an accessibility review of Edinburgh Castle, using the findings to implement improvements that enhance accessibility and inclusivity. Extend this initiative to other sites, ensuring they meet the needs of all visitors.	Marketing and Engagement/ Experience
Actively engage with local communities at HES sites to foster meaningful connections, gather insights, and co-create initiatives that reflect their needs and aspirations.	Operations
Utilise insights from the Empire research report to engage with communities and stakeholders, addressing inequalities and reshaping narratives through collaborative events and exhibitions.	Marketing and Engagement/ Outreach & Learning
Enhance site interpretation to resonate with contemporary communities by presenting an honest view of history that promotes inclusion and addresses inequalities.	Marketing and Engagement/ Experience
Improve our website's accessibility by incorporating community languages and British Sign Language (BSL) to ensure a more inclusive experience for all users.	Marketing and Engagement/ Communications

What	Who is responsible?
Adopt a Person-Centred Property Care Strategy by implementing an inclusive approach to ensure those with diverse backgrounds and abilities, are actively engaged in the process.	Cultural Assets/ Policy, Strategy and Systems
Develop and implement a collection access policy that ensures equitable and inclusive access to all users, enhancing public engagement and fostering a deeper understanding of our heritage collections.	Cultural Assets/ PiC Collections and Applied Conservation
Develop and implement an evaluation framework to enhance access to the HES Archive and library collections.	Cultural Assets/ Archives
Expand the use of colour vision-friendly palettes across all HES websites by ensuring organisational agreement and commitment to accessibility.	Heritage/Cross Directorate
Enhance access to our offerings and actively promote learning opportunities to ensure all individuals feel welcomed and valued. This includes implementing targeted audience projects and initiatives that cater to the unique needs of various groups.	Marketing and Engagement/ Learning & Inclusion
Develop and consult on a new Designations Policy and Selection Guidance. This will outline the process for identifying and protecting diverse heritage sites, with consultation and approval planned for 2026-27.	Heritage/ Designations
Integrate diverse visitor personas and categories into trove as part of its ongoing management and engagement strategy.	Marketing and Engagement
Create and deliver creative, multiplatform programmes that centre on the wider historic environment, aiming to inspire and connect with diverse audiences, including both those we currently engage and new communities.	Marketing and Engagement/ Learning & Inclusion

Our People

What is the inequality that we want to address?

For this outcome, we aim to address the underrepresentation and limited advancement opportunities for diverse groups within the workforce, particularly in relation to leadership roles. Barriers to inclusion, such as unconscious bias in recruitment, lack of culturally diverse mentoring and development programmes, and workload pressures, have a significant impact on people from minority ethnic backgrounds, individuals with disabilities, LGBT+ communities, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Addressing these inequalities will create a more representative workforce and foster an inclusive culture that supports fair progression for all.

Outcome

We continue to strive for a truly diverse and inclusive culture where people feel valued and can be their true self.

We are dedicated to building and sustaining a diverse workforce, Board, and volunteer base that reflects our communities. Through equitable access to professional development and pathways to leadership, we seek to create a diverse and inclusive culture that nurtures growth. We acknowledge that barriers to advancement can take many forms, including those related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and access to resources. We are dedicated to tackling these challenges to ensure a fair and equitable environment where everyone has an equal chance to succeed when opportunities arise.

General equality duties

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations



Colleagues at the Improving Access Symposium

Evidence to support the Equality Outcome

Internal Engagement Findings on Recruitment and Career Development

The internal engagement report indicates that, while HES has made strides toward inclusivity in recruitment (e.g., removing unnecessary degree requirements), there are still perceptions of bias that favour certain demographics. Suggestions included diversifying recruitment panels, implementing 'blind' application processes, and offering career development specifically for underrepresented groups. Respondents stressed that strong leadership commitment to EDI is essential. Senior leaders are encouraged to model inclusive behaviours and integrate EDI responsibilities into management roles, establishing accountability and transparency throughout the organisation.

Barriers to Leadership for Underrepresented Groups

Engagement sessions with Equality Champions and colleague forums highlighted practical barriers to leadership, such as workload pressures, limited access to professional development, and lack of mentorship or support networks for diverse groups. These challenges prevent fair representation of minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people, LGBT+ groups, and other underrepresented groups in leadership and decision-making.

Key strategies, plans and initiatives

- People Strategy*
- Our Behaviours Framework*
- Learning and Development Programme*

* Internal documents, not publicly available



Audience and speakers attending 'Where Are You From: Tales of Migration and Identity'

Actions

All Directorates will identify equalities activities to deliver this outcome annually in line with the annual operating planning process between 2025-29.

What	Who is responsible?
Conduct an Equality Audit to assess current practices, policies, and accessibility measures across our organisation, identifying areas for improvement to enhance inclusivity.	Equalities/ER&P
Establish Equality Ambassadors in HES to enhance ownership and increase engagement across the organisation, fostering a culture of inclusivity and promoting awareness of equality initiatives.	Equalities/ER&P
Deliver our People Strategy and annual implementation plans to deliver this outcome for Our People. The People Strategy outlines the themes and areas for focus for the next five years under four pillars: 'Engage Our People', 'Employee Experience', 'Realise Potential', and 'Responsibility to Lead'.	People



HR Manager, Helen Mellis, Head of People Services, Deeba Ali, and HR Officer, Alan Gibson



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