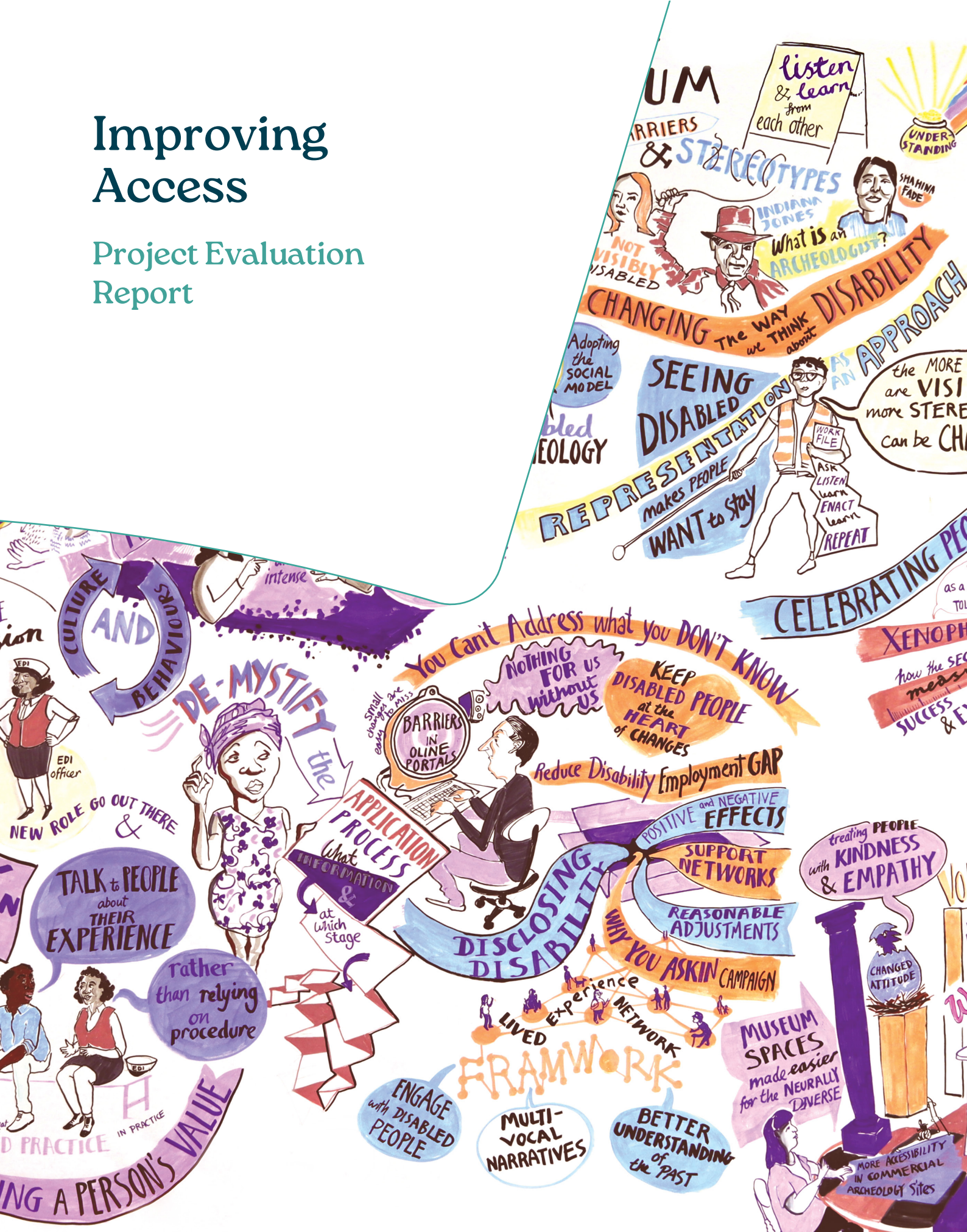


Improving Access

Project Evaluation Report



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This report was prepared by: Abigail Hunt (Professor of Practice, University of Nottingham), Karolyn Webb, and Mar Roigé Oliver (Historic Environment Scotland), as part of the delivery of the Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment.

Contact: skills@hes.scot.

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Introduction

The Improving Access Project aimed to identify the cultures, processes, and structures that discriminate people from the sector's workforce in Scotland and understand how we, as a sector, can embed practice which will support transformative change. This was done by focusing on four key questions:

- What activity is happening in Scotland's regions to improve access to heritage careers? How accessible are these opportunities and how well do they align to create clear, consistent career pathways for people looking to enter the workforce?
- What is the future, current and past graduate, apprentice, trainee, intern, and fellow experience of entry opportunities? What are the main barriers they face?
- What are the experience and perceptions of heritage from individuals with lived experience of protected characteristics under the Equality Act of 2010, and those from excluded socio-economic backgrounds?
- What support mechanisms need to be put into place to support organisations to develop and deliver accessible opportunities, and for people to access them?

This evaluation report evaluates the extent to which the Improving Access Project met its aims and objectives. It aims to:

- Establish if the Improving Access Project was able to clearly identify the cultures, processes, and structures that discriminate people from the sector's workforce in Scotland.
- Evaluate the extent to which the project was able to identify good inclusive practice that can be embedded into wider sector practice to support transformative change.

This will be achieved through the evaluation of data collected during lived experience focus groups, a sector workshop, and final reports produced by consultants during the project. The report has been produced with accessibility in mind as we would like all project stakeholders and the general public to engage with our findings.

Background

Improving Access was a research project that sought to understand how we can improve access to the heritage sector's workforce in Scotland and understand the barriers faced by those trying to enter it. Improving Access was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund through the [Heritage Innovation Fund](#). The project was developed by the Improving Access group, an action-centred delivery group made up of employers, development bodies, public bodies and community groups as part of the Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment.

For years, the heritage sector has faced systemic workforce challenges which impact on the sustainability of sector organisations. These challenges include skills, knowledge and experience gaps caused by a lack of workforce diversity (DC Research, 2023; Historic Environment Scotland, 2024a). The sector's long-standing issues with workforce diversity and accessibility have been well documented, with yearly surveys and reports consistently highlighting that the workforce is largely highly educated, female, heterosexual, abled and white. Examples of this can be found in Fox (2022), Chief Economist Directorate (2022), Aitchison (2022), Inc Arts and the Bridge Group (2020), Davison et al. (2019), BOP Consulting (2016), Kemp (2017), Hook et al. (2016).

It is within this context that the Improving Access group undertook a survey in June 2022 to map available routes into the sector, plans, challenges, and support needs. The survey showed that:

- Less than 50% of the organisations who responded offered any paid work-based learning opportunities and only 28% offered bespoke opportunities to people with backgrounds excluded from the workforce.
- 79% were unable to offer all the opportunities they would like to.
- The majority wanted to increase or change their offer, with 11% not offering work-based learning opportunities but wanting to start, 36% wanting to increase their offer and 31% wanting to offer different areas/levels of work.

It is important to highlight that the Improving Access project is set within the context of other high-profile projects focusing on anti-racism, decolonisation, and inclusion in the heritage sector within Scotland and the wider UK. Additionally, the project was developed within the framework of the Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment (SIP) which highlights the need to attract future talent and improve access to the workforce as one of its priority themes, due to the recognised challenges with recruitment across its footprint (Historic Environment Scotland, 2024b). The plan, published in 2019 and refreshed in 2024, includes actions across its footprint that seek to tackle accessibility and equality work. There are strategic drivers for this work in the national strategy, [Our Past Our Future](#), and Scottish

Government policy drivers such as the Young Person's Guarantee, Disability Employment Gap, and Child poverty.

Over the past five years, there have been a variety of projects across the wider UK tackling the decolonisation of heritage, examples of which can be found in Cox & Smyth (2020), University of the Arts London (2024), Imperial War Museums (2024), or Bunning (2024). Some projects have led to the creation of useful free tools such as Curating for Change (2024) who produced resources for inclusive recruitment, or Inc Arts Unlock (2023).

Government measures to improve access to the sector have also been taken. This is the case of the Kickstart Scheme which created employment for young people on Universal Credit. In Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland (2023) supported 28 organisations to offer 48 Real Living Wage placements through the Kickstart Scheme between 2021 and 2022. Similarly, the Welsh Government has developed an Anti-racist Wales Action Plan which has led to the creation of the Anti-racist Wales Culture, Heritage and Sport Fund (Llywodraeth Cymru, 2024).

Parallel projects taking place in Scotland are Museum Galleries Scotland's (2024) Delivering Change and the National Library of Scotland's Heritage Innovation Fund project.

Need for the project

The 2022 survey results highlighted the need for a coordinated cross-sector exploration of sustainable collaborative sector-wide approaches to improve the diversity of and access to the heritage workforce.

Workforce diversity and accessibility issues have led to a heritage sector that is not representative of the communities it serves. This is a complex problem that involves local, organisational and sectoral learning. As a sector wide issue, any proposed solutions tackling the lack of workforce diversity should be developed as part of a collaborative approach while having local applicability.

Furthermore, previous projects have addressed only one element of the system limiting the opportunity for systemic change. It is vital to the sustainability of heritage organisations and sector, that a long term, workable, sustainable solution to this workforce challenge is found. Without this we risk perpetuating existing inequalities in heritage organisations, communities and society.

Design and methodology

Overall approach

HES employed a mixed-methods approach, utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure the depth and breadth necessary to collect data that sought to meet the aims and objectives of the Access to Work Project. The combination of focus groups, surveys, and co-design workshops allowed us to capture rich, detailed narratives from individuals with lived experience, while also collecting measurable data from organisations across the sector. This has allowed us to explore the answers to those questions in the findings and then make a statement on the extent to which the project was successful.

This approach was essential to address the four key evaluation questions:

- What activity is happening in Scotland's regions to improve access to heritage careers? How accessible are these opportunities?
- What is the learner experience, both current and past, and what barriers do they face at different career stages?
- How do marginalised communities perceive the heritage sector, and what barriers do they encounter?
- What support mechanisms need to be implemented to help heritage organisations create accessible opportunities?

Data collection methods

Focus groups

Overview:

Focus groups were conducted with targeted demographic groups, including those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, individuals from working-class backgrounds, work-based learners, and graduates. Each group was selected based on their unique experiences within the heritage sector, either as current participants or as individuals who had attempted to enter the sector but faced barriers.

Facilitators:

These sessions were led by expert facilitators from organisations such as the West of Scotland Regional Equalities Council (WSREC), Arc of Inclusion, and Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA), whose shared lived experiences helped create a safe and inclusive environment for open dialogue. Facilitators' expertise in working with marginalised communities played a crucial role in fostering trust and encouraging participants to share candidly.

Rationale:

Focus groups were chosen for their ability to generate in-depth qualitative insights that can capture the complexity of experiences across different demographic groups. By conducting group discussions, we were able to observe how participants interacted with each other, uncover shared experiences, and identify nuanced barriers that may not have emerged in individual interviews. This approach allowed us to identify barriers such as discrimination in hiring practices, lack of accessible career pathways, and insufficient support for marginalised communities.

Adaptations:

As a response to early feedback from participants, the language used in focus group guides was revised to be more inclusive and accessible, ensuring that all participants could engage comfortably with the process.

Survey

Overview:

Heritage organisations were surveyed in June 2022, before the start of the project. This survey aimed to assess the current diversity practices, support mechanisms, and gaps in workforce inclusion within the heritage sector. Questions focused on topics such as the availability of paid internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning opportunities, as well as the barriers organisations faced when offering these opportunities.

Quantitative scope:

The survey gathered data from a broad range of organisations across Scotland, providing an overview of sector-wide practices. The results offered quantitative measures of current diversity initiatives and identified common challenges faced by organisations in supporting workforce diversity.

Rationale:

Surveys were used to complement the qualitative findings from the focus groups by providing measurable data that could be analysed to identify patterns and trends across the sector. By using surveys, we were able to collect data from a larger sample of heritage organisations, which would have been difficult to achieve through qualitative methods alone. This allowed us to cross-check organisational practices against the lived experiences reported by focus group participants.

Co-design workshops

Overview:

Seven co-design workshops took place with the focus groups. These sessions were hosted by expert organisations including West of Scotland Regional Equalities Council (WSREC), Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) and Arc of Inclusion. Additionally, a later co-design workshop was held during the Improving Access Spring Symposium in May 2024. This workshop brought together key stakeholders, including heritage organisations, community groups, and individuals who either worked in or aspired to work in the heritage sector. Participants engaged in collaborative activities designed to develop practical recommendations for addressing workforce diversity challenges.

Rationale:

The co-design workshops were integral to the project's participatory approach. By involving key stakeholders in the process of designing solutions, we ensured that the recommendations were grounded in the lived experiences of those most affected by the sector's barriers. The co-design approach fostered a sense of ownership among participants and increased the likelihood that the solutions developed would be practical and implementable across the sector.

Data analysis techniques

Thematic analysis

Qualitative data:

Qualitative data from focus groups and workshops were analysed using **thematic coding**. Researchers systematically identified recurring themes related to barriers to sector entry, recruitment biases, and the underrepresentation of marginalised groups. Each theme was then cross-checked to ensure that patterns were consistent across different demographic groups and focus group sessions. Themes such as "lack of accessible career pathways," "discriminatory hiring practices," and "exclusion from senior leadership" were common across all groups.

Triangulation:

To enhance the validity of the findings, we used triangulation, cross-referencing qualitative insights with quantitative survey data. For example, if participants reported a lack of paid internships as a barrier, we corroborated this with survey data that indicated fewer than 50% of heritage organisations offered paid work-based learning opportunities. This method allowed us to validate findings across different data sources and ensure consistency.

Co-design workshops

Survey data:

Quantitative data from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentages, to provide a measurable overview of workforce diversity practices across the heritage sector. Cross-tabulation was employed to explore relationships between variables, such as the size of the organisation and the diversity of its workforce practices. The analysis helped identify sector-wide trends, such as the fact that only 28% of organisations provided targeted opportunities for marginalised groups.

Rationale:

The quantitative analysis allowed us to measure diversity initiatives in concrete terms, such as the proportion of organisations offering paid internships or the regional distribution of opportunities. This data was crucial for providing a baseline against which we could compare the more qualitative insights from the focus groups.

Co-design process

The **co-design process** was a key feature of the project, ensuring that stakeholders and participants actively shaped both the data collection and the development of solutions:

Stakeholder contributions:

Participants in the focus groups and workshops were involved in shaping the research tools, such as survey questions and focus group guides. Their feedback influenced the refinement of questions to ensure they were inclusive, accessible, and reflective of the participants' lived experiences.

Methodological adaptations:

In response to participant feedback, several adjustments were made during the data collection phase. For instance, workshop activities were adapted to better accommodate different communication styles, ensuring that all participants, including those with disabilities, were able to fully engage in the process.

Continuous engagement:

Participants were also consulted during the data analysis phase, particularly in the interpretation of themes. This helped ensure that the analysis accurately reflected the realities of the participants' experiences.

Addressing limitations

Sampling bias

Challenge: Certain focus groups, particularly those targeting individuals in rural areas, had lower participation rates than expected. This led to a potential sampling bias that could have affected the generalisability of the findings.

Mitigation: To address this limitation, we conducted follow-up interviews with individuals who were unable to participate in focus groups and made additional efforts to include online survey responses to reach a broader demographic. These additional data points helped fill gaps in representation.

Generalisation

Challenge: The qualitative findings reflect the specific context of Scotland's heritage sector and may not be fully applicable to other regions or sectors. Additionally, the focus on marginalised groups means that the findings are not representative of the entire workforce.

Mitigation: We clearly indicated the scope and limitations of the findings, ensuring that readers understand the specific context of the research. We recommend further research in other sectors and regions to complement the insights gained from this study.

Missing data from underrepresented groups

Challenge: There was limited data from certain underrepresented groups, particularly disabled individuals working in the historic environment sector. This gap may have affected the completeness of the findings.

Mitigation: While initial efforts to include disabled participants were made through focus groups and workshops, we recommend that future research prioritizes these groups to ensure more comprehensive data collection. In this evaluation, we noted the absence of this data and its potential impact on the generalisability of findings.

Linking methods to evaluation questions

Each method was explicitly linked to one or more of the four key evaluation questions, ensuring that the research remained focused on addressing the project's core objectives:

Focus groups contributed to understanding the experiences and barriers faced by marginalized groups in entering the heritage sector. This method was particularly valuable for answering the question: *What is the experience and perception of heritage from individuals with lived experience of protected characteristics and excluded socio-economic backgrounds?*

Surveys helped assess sector-wide practices and the accessibility of career pathways. The quantitative data gathered through surveys was crucial for answering:

What activity is happening in Scotland's regions to improve access to heritage careers, and how accessible are these opportunities?

Co-design workshops facilitated collaborative problem-solving, addressing the evaluation question: *What support mechanisms need to be implemented to help heritage organizations develop and deliver accessible opportunities?* The workshops produced actionable recommendations that were co-created with those most affected by the sector's exclusionary practices.

Data

The table summarises the key data collected from various demographic groups across the heritage sector, focusing on anonymized quotes, group summaries, and organizational feedback.

Target audience	Data format available
People who have undertaken work-based learning in the heritage sector	Anonymised quotes, anonymised detailed group summaries and report
People who have secured employment in the heritage sector via the “traditional” route	Anonymised quotes, anonymised detailed group summaries, and report
People who would like to work in the heritage sector and have tried to secure employment but were unsuccessful	Anonymised quotes, anonymised detailed group summaries, and report
People from communities that have been historically marginalised from entering the heritage sector (including class and socioeconomics)	Anonymised detailed group summaries
People working in or with the heritage sector with protected characteristics according to the Equalities Act of 2010 (including class and socioeconomics)	Anonymised detailed group summaries
Deaf, disabled people and those living with long-term conditions working in the historic environment sector	Anonymised detailed group summaries, and report
Heritage organisations, community groups, and individuals working or seeking to work in the heritage sector	Discussion recorded via post its and anonymised quotes recorded via post its

This methodology reflects a comprehensive and participatory approach to evaluating the Improving Access project, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to capture both the lived experiences of marginalised individuals and the broader trends in organisational practices. The inclusion of co-design workshops

ensured that the recommendations were grounded in practical, implementable solutions that reflect the needs of the heritage workforce.

Despite some limitations, such as sampling bias and missing data from certain groups, the project's methodology was adaptable and inclusive, ensuring that all participants were actively involved in shaping the research. The findings provide a solid foundation for future work aimed at improving diversity and inclusion within Scotland's heritage sector.

Results

WSREC (West of Scotland Regional Equalities Council) sessions summary

The WSREC sessions provided qualitative insights into the experiences of ethnic minority groups communities engaging with the heritage sector. This section reports on participants' experiences, the perceived barriers to entry into the workforce, and potential pathways into the sector.

Experiences with heritage and the heritage sector

Participants overwhelmingly felt that the heritage sector in Scotland is inaccessible and does not invite ethnic minority groups and communities to engage with or contribute to its institutions.

- **Cultural Disconnect:** Individuals reported not seeing their stories or communities represented in key heritage spaces such as museums and castles, which contributes to a sense of exclusion.
- **Lack of Representation:** Participants noted the absence of ethnic minority individuals in both staff roles and volunteer positions, especially in senior leadership or decision-making roles.
- **Inadequate Storytelling:** When ethnic minority, LGBTQ+, and disabled stories are told, they are often presented through a lens of struggle, reinforcing negative stereotypes rather than celebrating the contributions of these groups.
- **Visibility and Awareness:** There is a distinct lack of visibility of minorities at decision-making levels, and this has a direct impact on how inclusive the sector feels for ethnic minority groups.

Experiences of working or seeking employment in the sector

The WSREC sessions highlighted that ethnic minority individuals face specific challenges when seeking employment or trying to advance within the heritage sector:

- **Exclusive Hiring Practices:** Financial and social barriers, such as requiring a degree or volunteering experience, prevent many ethnic minority individuals from accessing roles in the heritage sector.
- **Micro-aggressions:** Micro-aggressions were commonly reported during interviews, with participants feeling disrespected or misunderstood due to their cultural backgrounds.
- **Lack of Feedback:** Job applicants often received little to no feedback after interviews, making it difficult to improve for future opportunities.

- **De-motivation and Exclusion:** The overall feeling of exclusion from the sector leads to a lack of confidence in applying for roles, as individuals believe they will not be hired.
- **Unclear Job Advertisements:** Many participants felt that the language used in job advertisements was inaccessible and not inclusive, deterring ethnic minority individuals from applying.

Accessibility of pathways into the workforce

Participants reported that entry points into the heritage workforce are not clear, visible, or accessible:

- **Limited Engagement with Communities:** Heritage organisations often fail to engage with ethnic minority groups and communities during the recruitment process, resulting in a lack of awareness about job opportunities.
 - Advertisements were rarely distributed through community channels, such as local hubs, places of worship, or community newspapers, further limiting access.
- **Lack of Knowledge about Career Opportunities:** There is minimal knowledge among ethnic minority groups and communities about the breadth of heritage careers beyond traditional museum roles.

What the heritage sector can improve

Key suggestions from WSREC participants:

- **Redefine Heritage:** Establish a more inclusive definition of heritage that recognises Scotland's multicultural identity.
- **Increase Visibility in Schools:** Engage more actively with schools and collaborate with community groups to introduce students to heritage careers.
- **Combat Recruitment Bias:** Improve recruitment practices by adopting anonymised recruitment and focusing on skills-based hiring rather than qualifications.
 - Introduce recruitment tools that are accessible for neurodivergent individuals and others with specific needs.
- **Engage with Marginalised Groups:** Build connections between heritage employers and young people from diverse backgrounds (ethnic minority groups, disabled, LGBTQ+).

Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) focus groups

This section reports the findings from the Glasgow Disability Alliance focus groups, which provided insights into the challenges faced by disabled individuals in the heritage sector. It is important to note that sample size for these focus groups was

limited (for more information see Acknowledging Data Limitations section in page 24).Generalisation of findings

Recruitment and employment experiences

Participants highlighted several issues related to recruitment and their experiences working in the heritage sector:

- **Reluctance to Disclose Disabilities:** Many participants did not feel comfortable disclosing their disabilities during the recruitment process or in the workplace. Concerns about how management would respond and whether it would be safe to disclose were significant factors.
- **Lack of Knowledge of Rights:** Many individuals were unaware of their rights to reasonable adjustments or Access to Work support, which contributed to the challenges they faced in securing or maintaining employment.
- **Inadequate Support:** Participants also felt that their skills and potential were often overlooked or not fully developed within their roles. There was a lack of opportunities for progression, and many reported that their work was not valued by colleagues or management.

Workplace support and social integration

The lack of support for disabled individuals within the heritage sector was a recurring theme:

- **Limited Peer Support:** Disabled employees felt isolated at work, as existing support networks, such as disability affinity groups, were often under-resourced and relied on a few individuals.
- **Social Isolation:** Disabled staff often felt excluded from social activities within the workplace, which limited their ability to integrate into wider teams. Important information was often shared informally during these social events, further disadvantaging disabled employees.

Organisational policies and training

Participants highlighted issues with existing policies and training:

- **Sickness Absence Policies:** The Bradford scoring system, a tool used to monitor absences, was seen as punitive and disproportionately affected disabled employees, creating stress and reducing job security.
- **Tokenistic Training:** Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training, although welcomed, was often perceived as tokenistic and not leading to meaningful change within organisations. Some employees had to take annual leave to attend training due to understaffing.

Recommendations for improvement

Key recommendations from the GDA focus group include:

- **Compassionate HR Policies:** Introduce more supportive policies, such as Disability Leave, and revise punitive sickness policies.
- **Improve EDI Training:** Ensure EDI training is substantive and results in tangible changes within the workplace. Staff surveys should be more meaningful and lead to actionable results.
- **Increase Peer Support:** Establish well-resourced Disability Networks and ensure disabled employees have access to support within the organisation.

Pre-project survey – quantitative data (June 2022)

The pre-project survey gathered quantitative data from heritage organisations across Scotland regarding diversity practices, barriers, and workforce inclusion. Here are the key results:

Workforce diversity initiatives

- **Paid Internships:** 28% of heritage organisations reported offering paid internships, which is a significant barrier to entry for low-income individuals.
- **Apprenticeship Programs:** 15% of organisations offer apprenticeships specifically aimed at supporting underrepresented groups. These programmes are more common in urban areas.

Recruitment practices

- **Unpaid Volunteering:** 57% of organisations indicated that unpaid volunteering is a primary pathway to employment in the sector, which disproportionately affects marginalized groups who cannot afford to work without pay.
- **Anonymized Recruitment:** Only 12% of organisations use anonymized recruitment processes to reduce unconscious bias in hiring.

Support for disabled employees

- **Workplace Adjustments:** Only 18% of organisations reported that they actively informed candidates about available workplace adjustments during recruitment.
- **EDI Training:** 30% of organisations reported that they offered regular EDI training to staff, though many focus group participants felt that these sessions were not effective in creating a more inclusive environment.

Geographic discrepancies

- **Urban vs. Rural:** Organisations in urban centres (Glasgow, Edinburgh) were more likely to have formal diversity initiatives compared to rural organisations. Rural organisations reported fewer resources and opportunities for engagement with underrepresented groups.

Arc of inclusion and sector-wide co-design workshops

The co-design workshops held by Arc of Inclusion throughout 2023 included heritage professionals from a variety of backgrounds and with different lived experiences. In addition to these workshops, a co-design workshop held during the Improving Access Spring Symposium in May 2024 brought together heritage professionals, community leaders, and individuals from marginalised backgrounds to feed into the findings. The combination of these workshops was the key to the development of practical recommendations for improving access to heritage careers.

Key recommendations

- **Anonymised Recruitment:** Participants advocated for the widespread adoption of anonymised recruitment to mitigate unconscious bias. Heritage organisations were encouraged to remove personal identifiers (e.g., names, addresses) from applications.
- **Skills-Based Hiring:** Workshop participants strongly recommended shifting the hiring focus from qualifications to skills-based assessments. Many marginalised individuals may not have access to higher education but possess valuable transferable skills that can contribute meaningfully to heritage organisations. This shift would allow a broader range of candidates to access roles within the sector.
- **Financial Support for Internships:** One of the central themes discussed was the importance of offering paid internships and providing financial support for work-based learning opportunities. This would help reduce the financial barriers that disproportionately affect low-income individuals and marginalised communities. The quantitative survey highlighted that only 28% of heritage organisations offer paid internships.

Recommendations for supporting disabled employees

The workshops focused on identifying practical ways to improve workplace support for disabled employees:

- **Reasonable Adjustments and Proactive Policies:** Participants stressed the need for heritage organisations to implement proactive policies ensuring that reasonable adjustments are automatically offered rather than leaving it to individuals to request them. This approach would prevent disabled individuals from feeling that they must advocate constantly for their rights.

- **Peer Support Networks:** Another key recommendation was the creation of formal peer support networks within organisations, which would provide spaces for disabled employees to connect, share experiences, and advocate for their needs collectively.
- **EDI Training for Managers:** Participants agreed that Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training should be extended to all management levels to ensure that leaders within organisations are well-equipped to handle issues relating to accessibility, diversity, and inclusion.

Addressing the geographic discrepancies in resources

The workshops also emphasised the need to address the gap between urban and rural organisations in terms of resources for diversity initiatives:

- **Resource Allocation:** Many rural organisations reported that they did not have the same access to resources as their urban counterparts, which limited their ability to implement diversity programmes or engage with underrepresented groups. Workshop participants suggested creating funding pools or regional partnerships that could support rural organisations in developing more inclusive practices.

Preliminary GDA Notes

This section summarises the findings from the preliminary notes on sessions conducted by the **Glasgow Disability Alliance**.

Barriers for disabled individuals

The preliminary notes from GDA sessions echoed many of the themes already highlighted in the focus groups, emphasising the unique challenges faced by disabled individuals in the heritage sector:

- **Fear of Disclosure:** Disabled participants reported fearing how disclosing their disability might affect their employment prospects. There was a persistent worry about negative reactions from managers or colleagues, contributing to a reluctance to share their needs openly.
- **Inconsistent Policy Implementation:** Participants noted that organisational policies around disability inclusion were often inconsistently applied, leading to a lack of trust in management and HR processes.

Training and development issues

- **Lack of Accessible Training:** Some participants expressed that existing training programmes were not designed with accessibility in mind. There was a

significant lack of accessible training materials or adjustments for neurodivergent individuals and those with physical disabilities.

- **Need for Structured Progression Pathways:** Disabled employees reported that there were few clear pathways for career progression within the heritage sector. There was a lack of development opportunities tailored to their specific needs, leading to stagnation in their roles.

Suggested improvements

- **Enhanced Communication:** Participants recommended that organisations improve internal communication, particularly around policy changes and opportunities for disabled employees to provide feedback.
- **Greater Involvement in Decision-Making:** Disabled employees expressed a desire to be more involved in organisational decision-making processes, especially regarding policies that directly affect them.

Conclusions

The findings from the different data sources – WSREC sessions, Glasgow Disability Alliance focus groups, the pre-project survey, and the co-design workshops – present a detailed view of the barriers and opportunities for improving diversity and inclusion within Scotland’s heritage sector.

- **WSREC findings** emphasised the significant barriers ethnic minority groups and underrepresented communities face in engaging with heritage, ranging from lack of representation in leadership roles to micro-aggressions in hiring.
- **GDA focus groups** provided deep insights into the challenges faced by disabled individuals in the workforce, highlighting the need for better workplace adjustments, peer support, and more inclusive HR policies.
- **Quantitative data** from the pre-project survey reinforced the qualitative insights, showing that only a small percentage of organizations offer paid internships or apprenticeships, and highlighting regional disparities between urban and rural areas.
- **Co-design workshops** offered actionable recommendations, particularly around anonymised recruitment, skills-based hiring, and financial support for marginalized groups.

By addressing these findings, Scotland’s heritage sector can make significant strides toward creating a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable workforce.

Findings and discussion

The Improving Access Project has provided a significant volume of data that identifies the systemic barriers to entry and progression within Scotland's heritage sector, particularly for marginalised groups, including ethnic minority groups, underrepresented communities and disabled individuals. By synthesising data from multiple sources, including focus groups (Arc of Inclusion, WSREC and GDA), pre-project survey, and co-design workshops, we can form a clearer understanding of how exclusionary practices manifest within the sector and what drives these inequalities. This section discusses the findings in greater depth, linking the data to form a cohesive narrative, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, acknowledging the limitations of the data, and linking back to the broader national context.

Linking data sets to form a comprehensive narrative

Through the qualitative and quantitative data gathered, several interconnected themes emerge. These themes (representation, recruitment practices, financial barriers, and support systems) are woven together to paint a picture of how exclusion is perpetuated within the heritage sector. By examining each theme in detail, we can begin to understand how the barriers faced by marginalised groups are systemic rather than incidental.

Lack of representation and visibility

Across the data sources, one of the most consistently reported challenges is the lack of representation of ethnic minority groups communities and disabled individuals in the heritage workforce, particularly in senior leadership and decision-making roles. The WSREC focus groups emphasised that ethnic minority individuals often feel that their communities are neither represented in the heritage narratives nor employed in heritage organisations. Participants expressed that when ethnic minority groups stories are included in heritage spaces, they are often framed in a negative or stereotypical light, focusing on struggle rather than achievement. This contributes to a sense of cultural alienation, where marginalised communities do not see themselves reflected in the sector and, as a result, feel excluded from participating in or accessing heritage careers.

Similarly, the GDA focus groups revealed that disabled individuals feel underrepresented and often unseen in the heritage workforce. The absence of disabled individuals in leadership roles reinforces feelings of isolation and lack of upward mobility within the sector. The pre-project survey corroborates these perceptions with quantitative data, showing that only 9% of heritage organisations reported ethnic minority individuals in leadership positions, while less than 5% reported disabled leaders. This lack of representation is a significant barrier, both at the entry level and for career progression. The gap in leadership representation

contributes to a vicious cycle where marginalised groups, feeling underrepresented and alienated, are less likely to pursue or advance in heritage careers. This absence of diverse representation in leadership not only affects the workforce but also impacts how communities perceive the sector. Without visible role models or champions from marginalised communities, the sector continues to be perceived as homogeneous and inaccessible. The lack of representation in decision-making positions means that the heritage sector's strategies and priorities may continue to overlook or misunderstand the needs of diverse communities. This cycle of exclusion is perpetuated when marginalised individuals do not see themselves represented, reducing the likelihood that they will seek opportunities within the sector.

Exclusionary recruitment practices

The recruitment process emerged as a significant barrier to entry for marginalised individuals, particularly for ethnic minority communities and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The WSREC focus groups revealed that participants often encountered micro-aggressions during the interview process, which left them feeling disrespected or misunderstood. The language used in job advertisements was often inaccessible or unclear, deterring applicants who did not feel the roles were designed for people like them. For ethnic minority individuals, the perception that heritage organisations do not make an effort to recruit from diverse communities was reinforced by the lack of engagement with ethnic minority networks, such as local community hubs or newspapers.

The pre-project survey provided quantitative support for these findings, with 57% of heritage organisations reporting that unpaid internships and volunteer roles are a primary pathway into employment. These roles disproportionately affect individuals from lower-income backgrounds, as unpaid work is often unaffordable for those who cannot rely on financial support from family or external sources. The reliance on unpaid internships is an exclusionary practice that further marginalizes individuals who are already facing socio-economic challenges, making it virtually impossible for them to gain the necessary experience to enter the sector. Furthermore, only 12% of heritage organisations reported using anonymised recruitment processes to reduce bias during hiring. The absence of anonymised recruitment perpetuates unconscious bias, allowing for factors such as a candidate's name, address, or educational background to influence hiring decisions. This bias disproportionately affects ethnic minority individuals, who are often excluded from consideration due to stereotypes or assumptions based on their demographic information.

When triangulated, these findings suggest a clear cause-and-effect relationship: exclusive recruitment practices, particularly the reliance on unpaid work and lack of anonymised hiring, create significant barriers to entry for marginalised groups. This contributes directly to the underrepresentation of ethnic minority groups and

disabled individuals in the workforce. The data suggest that without reforms to recruitment practices, heritage organisations will continue to struggle with diversity, as marginalised individuals are systematically excluded at the point of entry.

Identifying cause and effect

The Improving Access project highlights several clear cause-and-effect relationships that explain why diversity and inclusion remain challenges in Scotland's heritage sector. By analysing the data from different perspectives, we can trace the root causes of these barriers and understand their impacts on the workforce.

Financial barriers and workforce diversity

One of the most striking findings across the data sets is the impact of financial barriers on workforce diversity. The pre-project survey revealed that 57% of heritage organisations rely on unpaid internships and volunteer work as entry-level roles. This practice disproportionately affects individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, many of whom are from marginalised communities. Participants in the WSREC focus groups identified the inability to afford unpaid work as a primary barrier to gaining experience in the heritage sector. Participants expressed that without financial compensation, pursuing a career in heritage was not a viable option.

The GDA focus groups also highlighted the financial challenges faced by disabled individuals, particularly when it came to accessing career progression opportunities. Participants noted that they were often unable to participate in professional development or training due to the associated costs, which further limited their ability to advance within the sector.

The financial exclusion perpetuated by unpaid internships and underpaid entry-level roles creates a direct cause-and-effect relationship: individuals who cannot afford to work without pay are systematically excluded from heritage careers. This financial barrier, compounded by existing socio-economic inequalities, disproportionately affects marginalised communities and contributes to the homogeneity of the workforce. Without structural changes to how entry-level opportunities are offered, the sector will continue to exclude those from lower-income backgrounds, limiting the diversity of its workforce.

Lack of support systems for disabled employees

The GDA focus groups revealed that disabled individuals face significant barriers to career progression due to the lack of structured support systems within heritage organisations. Participants noted that many organisations do not proactively offer reasonable adjustments during recruitment or employment, leaving disabled employees to advocate for their needs in an environment where they already feel

marginalised. This issue was supported by the pre-project survey, which showed that only 18% of organisations proactively informed candidates about the availability of workplace adjustments.

The absence of peer support networks was another significant barrier identified by GDA participants. Without formalised networks, disabled employees felt isolated and lacked the necessary resources to navigate the challenges of working in the heritage sector. This lack of support often led to stagnation in career progression, as disabled employees were unable to access the development opportunities that would allow them to advance within their roles.

The cause-and-effect relationship here is clear: the lack of support structures, such as reasonable adjustments and peer networks, directly contributes to the exclusion and career stagnation of disabled employees. Without these systems in place, disabled individuals face additional barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the workforce or advancing within their careers. The data suggest that the absence of formalised support for disabled employees is a major factor in their underrepresentation in leadership roles.

Acknowledging Data Limitations

While the Improving Access project has provided valuable insights into the barriers facing marginalised communities in Scotland's heritage sector, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the data. These limitations affect the generalisability of the findings and should be considered when interpreting the results.

Sampling bias

The focus groups, particularly those targeting rural areas and disabled employees, had lower participation rates than expected. This introduces a potential sampling bias, as the experiences of individuals in rural areas may differ significantly from those in urban centres. The rural focus groups may not have captured the full range of barriers faced by individuals in these regions, particularly in terms of access to resources and engagement with heritage organisations. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the challenges specific to rural areas.

Missing data on disabled employees

There was a notable gap in the data regarding disabled individuals working in the historic environment sector. Although the GDA focus groups provided valuable insights, the sample size was limited, and the absence of data from rural disabled employees may have affected the completeness of the findings. This gap limits our understanding of how accessibility challenges differ across geographic regions and organisational contexts. Future research should prioritise collecting more

comprehensive data from disabled employees to ensure a fuller understanding of their experiences.

Generalisation of findings

The qualitative findings reflect the specific context of Scotland's heritage sector, which has its own unique challenges related to tradition, volunteerism, and funding. As such, the findings may not be fully applicable to other sectors or regions, especially where different socio-political dynamics, funding structures, and workforce compositions exist. While the barriers identified, such as exclusionary recruitment practices and financial barriers, are likely to resonate with marginalised individuals across many industries, the heritage sector's reliance on volunteers and unpaid roles presents challenges that may be specific to this field. It is also important to recognise that certain regional and organisational differences might exist within Scotland itself. The challenges faced by smaller, rural organisations in implementing diversity and inclusion practices may differ from those in larger, urban institutions, which have more resources and a wider pool of talent to draw from. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying these findings universally across the heritage sector.

Linking key findings to the national and local context

The findings of the Improving Access project align closely with both national and local policy priorities related to diversity and inclusion in Scotland. The heritage sector, as a key part of Scotland's cultural and economic landscape, plays a critical role in shaping how communities are represented and engaged. By linking the project's findings back to broader national strategies, we can see how the barriers identified in the evaluation mirror wider systemic issues and how local efforts can contribute to national change.

National policy alignment

Scotland's national strategies for workforce development, such as the [Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment](#) and the [Our Past Our Future strategy](#), prioritise the creation of inclusive and diverse workforces. These policies highlight the need for the heritage sector to attract future talent from diverse backgrounds to address both skills shortages and workforce sustainability. The findings of this evaluation demonstrate that while there is widespread awareness of the importance of these goals, the practical implementation of diversity initiatives remains inconsistent across the sector.

The pre-project survey revealed that many organisations are struggling to offer inclusive work-based learning opportunities, with less than 28% of heritage organisations providing paid internships and only 15% offering apprenticeships

aimed at marginalised groups. This lack of financial support creates significant barriers for individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, directly undermining the sector's ability to meet its national policy objectives. The evaluation shows that these financial barriers need to be addressed to achieve the goals outlined in the Skills Investment Plan and other national strategies.

Moreover, the underrepresentation of ethnic minority groups and disabled individuals in leadership roles, as highlighted in both the qualitative focus groups and the quantitative survey data, demonstrates a misalignment between policy intent and practice. While national policies emphasise the importance of inclusive leadership and diverse representation, heritage organisations have yet to implement the structural changes necessary to achieve these outcomes. The findings suggest that Scotland's heritage sector needs to focus on tangible actions that can create lasting change.

Local context and sectoral challenges

The Improving Access project also highlights specific challenges within the local context of Scotland's heritage sector, particularly around geographic disparities and the varying levels of resources available to different organisations. The pre-project survey indicated that rural heritage organisations are less likely to have formal diversity programmes in place, largely due to limited resources and staff capacity. This creates a geographic divide where urban organisations, particularly in major centres like Glasgow and Edinburgh, are better equipped to offer inclusive opportunities than their rural counterparts.

The co-design workshops provided additional context on how these geographic challenges manifest in practice, with participants from rural areas noting that they often struggle to recruit from diverse communities due to a lack of engagement with marginalised groups. This geographic disparity limits the ability of rural organisations to fully participate in the national diversity agenda, highlighting the need for more targeted support to ensure that diversity initiatives are scalable and sustainable across all regions of Scotland.

Linking these findings back to the Background section of the report, it is clear that the workforce challenges faced by the heritage sector are not new. For years, the sector has struggled with a lack of workforce diversity, as highlighted in previous reports by organisations such as DC Research (2023) and Historic Environment Scotland (2024a). This project builds on that foundation by providing detailed insights into the specific barriers that prevent individuals from accessing and advancing within heritage careers. However, it also underscores the ongoing difficulty of translating high-level policy ambitions into effective, localised practices.

The findings of the Improving Access Project reveal a range of systemic barriers that prevent marginalised communities from fully participating in Scotland's heritage sector. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, the project has shed light on critical issues such as underrepresentation, exclusionary recruitment practices, financial obstacles, and inadequate support systems for ethnic minority groups and disabled individuals. The data demonstrate that these barriers are deeply embedded within the sector's structures, perpetuating exclusion and limiting diversity, especially at leadership levels. While the findings align with national diversity policies, the gap between policy and practice remains significant, particularly in rural areas where resources are limited. Moving forward, addressing these systemic barriers will require targeted, actionable changes that move beyond rhetoric to real, sustainable practices, creating a more inclusive heritage sector that truly reflects the diversity of Scotland's communities.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Improving Access Project offers an illuminating and, at times, disheartening portrait of Scotland's heritage sector; a sector where systemic barriers, entrenched by long-standing cultural, socio-economic, and institutional practices, have made it difficult for marginalised communities to access or progress within. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, including focus groups, surveys, and co-design workshops, the project revealed the multiple and interlinked obstacles faced by ethnic minority groups, disabled individuals, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

These barriers range from underrepresentation in leadership, exclusive recruitment practices, and financial obstacles, to the lack of structured support systems for marginalised groups. The findings reveal that the heritage sector is missing significant opportunities to diversify its workforce and better reflect the communities it serves. Furthermore, the sector's potential to innovate and grow is constrained by these systemic inequities. For heritage organisations to succeed in the long term and meet national policy goals, they must urgently address these challenges.

Representation in leadership: driving systemic change from the top

The absence of ethnic minority and disabled individuals in **leadership roles** not only limits the perspectives at the decision-making table but also perpetuates a vicious cycle of exclusion throughout the sector. **Leadership diversity** is critical for fostering an inclusive organisational culture that is committed to change. Without representation at the top, initiatives for inclusion can be undermined or deprioritised.

- **Targeted Leadership Development Programmes:** To break this cycle, heritage organisations must implement targeted leadership programmes specifically designed for marginalised individuals. This includes creating opportunities for mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership training aimed at underrepresented groups. This approach is essential to build a pipeline of future leaders who are reflective of Scotland's diverse communities.
- **Accountability in Leadership Representation:** Organisations should adopt measurable diversity targets for leadership roles. By setting explicit, time-bound goals for increasing ethnic minority and disabled representation at senior levels, heritage organisations can track progress and ensure that leadership diversity is prioritised at all levels. Reporting mechanisms should be put in place to monitor this progress over time and hold organisations accountable for meeting these goals.
- **Increased Outreach and Recruitment for Senior Roles:** In addition to leadership development, organisations should proactively expand their

outreach when recruiting for senior roles, targeting underrepresented groups and forging partnerships with professional networks and organisations that focus on leadership diversity. A deliberate, active approach is needed to ensure that qualified ethnic minority and disabled candidates are considered for leadership positions, particularly in regions outside major urban centres where diversity in leadership is even more limited.

Reforming recruitment practices: breaking down exclusionary barriers

The recruitment processes in the heritage sector were found to be rife with exclusionary practices, including unconscious bias, reliance on unpaid internships, and the use of exclusive language in job advertisements. These factors systematically prevent marginalised communities from accessing job opportunities in the sector. The results from the focus groups and surveys show that recruitment is often the first and most insurmountable barrier for individuals from ethnic minority groups and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

- **Anonymised Recruitment to Combat Bias:** Introducing anonymised recruitment should be a sector-wide priority to address unconscious bias in hiring. Anonymised applications remove personal identifiers, such as names and addresses, which are often subject to implicit bias, particularly against minority ethnic groups and those from lower-income neighbourhoods. The sector must take definitive steps to standardise this practice to ensure fairer recruitment processes that focus on candidates' skills and experience, rather than personal backgrounds.
- **Skills-Based Hiring for Inclusive Recruitment:** The heritage sector's reliance on formal academic qualifications has been identified as a key barrier for individuals from non-traditional backgrounds. Shifting toward skills-based hiring will open the door to a broader, more diverse talent pool, including those who may not have access to higher education but possess valuable transferable skills. This change would particularly benefit those from ethnic minority groups and socio-economically disadvantaged groups, who are often excluded by traditional qualification-based recruitment criteria.
- **Accessible and Inclusive Job Advertisements:** Job advertisements must be revisited to ensure that they use inclusive language and are distributed through diverse networks. To reach marginalised communities, advertisements should be disseminated through community organisations, local networks, and ethnic minority group hubs that can reach those who may not traditionally engage with mainstream recruitment platforms. Additionally, job descriptions should focus on what a role requires in terms of practical skills, rather than an overly formalised set of qualifications that may deter qualified candidates.

Financial inclusion: removing barriers through compensation

A **critical financial barrier** to workforce entry in the heritage sector is the prevalence of **unpaid internships** and **volunteer roles** as entry pathways. These roles disproportionately affect individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who are unable to work without financial support. The findings demonstrate a clear link between unpaid work and the homogeneity of the workforce, particularly at entry levels. Reform in this area is essential to foster diversity in the heritage workforce.

- **Paid Internships and Apprenticeships:** The most direct way to reduce financial barriers is by offering paid internships and apprenticeships across the sector, particularly those targeted at marginalised communities. Every entry-level opportunity, especially internships, should come with a living wage that covers the costs of living and ensures accessibility for individuals from all socio-economic backgrounds. This recommendation is backed by both the quantitative survey data and the qualitative findings from the WSREC and GDA focus groups.
- **Financial Support for Rural and Smaller Organisations:** Smaller or rural heritage organisations often face financial constraints that prevent them from offering paid internships or structured apprenticeship programmes. Establishing sector-wide funding pools to support these organisations is a critical next step. Regional partnerships or collaborative funding mechanisms could allow smaller organisations to provide paid internships without facing a financial burden, ensuring that rural and underfunded organisations can still contribute to workforce diversity efforts.
- **Stipends and Financial Aid for Work-Based Learning:** For work-based learning opportunities to be truly inclusive, they must come with stipends or other forms of financial assistance. Covering costs such as transportation, accommodation, and materials would allow individuals from low-income backgrounds to participate fully in the sector, removing the cost barriers that currently exclude many talented candidates.

Enhancing support for disabled employees: fostering inclusivity in the workplace

The lack of support systems for disabled employees was one of the most significant findings of the GDA focus groups. Disabled individuals reported feeling isolated, unsupported, and undervalued in the workforce. Many organisations were found to lack formal policies for providing reasonable adjustments, and peer support networks were under-resourced. Without structured support, disabled employees are unable to thrive or progress in the heritage sector.

- **Proactive Workplace Adjustments:** Organisations must adopt a proactive approach to workplace adjustments. Rather than waiting for employees to

request accommodations, adjustments should be offered as standard practice during recruitment and throughout employment. This would create a more welcoming environment for disabled individuals, ensuring they feel supported from the outset and reducing the emotional and professional burden of requesting accommodations.

- **Well-Resourced Peer Support Networks:** Disabled employees need access to formal peer support networks within organisations, which are adequately resourced and structured. These networks provide a vital space for disabled employees to connect, share experiences, and advocate for changes in workplace practices. By supporting peer networks, organisations can also benefit from ongoing feedback about their inclusion policies and identify areas for improvement.
- **Comprehensive EDI Training for All Staff:** Beyond tokenistic efforts, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training must be expanded and made more substantive. Managers and leaders, in particular, should undergo in-depth training that addresses disability rights, reasonable adjustments, and how to create inclusive working environments. The training should also include mechanisms for employees to provide feedback and influence organisational change. This will help organisations build a genuinely inclusive culture that fosters career progression for disabled employees.

Supporting rural organisations: bridging the geographic divide

The findings from the project underscored the geographic disparities in the heritage sector, with rural organisations often having fewer resources to implement diversity and inclusion initiatives. Urban organisations, particularly those based in Glasgow and Edinburgh, have access to more resources and a broader recruitment pool, leaving their rural counterparts behind in efforts to diversify.

- **Regional Collaboration and Resource Sharing:** To bridge this gap, heritage organisations must engage in regional collaborations that allow for resource sharing. By pooling resources, rural organisations can implement the same robust diversity initiatives as their urban counterparts, ensuring that geographic location does not become a barrier to workforce inclusion.
- **Targeted Support for Rural Diversity Initiatives:** The creation of regional diversity hubs would offer rural organisations access to shared expertise, training, and financial support for implementing inclusion practices. These hubs could provide recruitment tools, diversity training, and even financial aid to help smaller organisations implement inclusive programmes. This approach ensures that rural communities are not left out of national efforts to diversify the heritage workforce.
- **Localised Recruitment Strategies:** Given the unique challenges faced by rural organisations, there is a need for localised recruitment strategies that take

into account the specific demographics of rural areas. Recruitment efforts should engage local schools, community groups, and networks to raise awareness about heritage careers among underrepresented populations in these areas. By creating a pipeline from local communities to heritage roles, rural organisations can foster workforce diversity while addressing their unique recruitment challenges.

Sector-wide accountability framework: measuring and ensuring progress

To create lasting, systemic change in the heritage sector, there must be a robust sector-wide accountability framework that monitors and enforces diversity and inclusion practices. The findings of the Improving Access Project make it clear that while national policies exist, their implementation has been inconsistent. A framework that tracks progress and holds organisations accountable is essential to bridging the gap between policy and practice.

- **Establishing Clear Diversity Metrics:** The framework should require all heritage organisations to report on specific diversity metrics, including the proportion of ethnic minority groups, disabled, and socio-economically disadvantaged individuals in their workforce, particularly in leadership roles. This data should be collected annually and made publicly available to provide transparency and incentivise progress across the sector.
- **Annual Reporting and Sector-Wide Reviews:** Organisations should be required to submit annual diversity reports detailing their progress in meeting diversity goals, recruitment practices, and workforce demographics. These reports would be reviewed by a national body tasked with overseeing diversity efforts in the sector. The body would offer guidance and support to organisations that fall behind, ensuring that they have the resources and strategies necessary to improve their performance.
- **Sector-Wide Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** To ensure that all heritage organisations benefit from shared learning and best practices, the sector should hold annual conferences or workshops where organisations can share their experiences, challenges, and successes in implementing diversity initiatives. This will foster a culture of continuous improvement and help smaller organisations benefit from the expertise of their larger counterparts.

Conclusions

The Improving Access Project has revealed that the barriers faced by marginalised communities in Scotland's heritage sector are not isolated incidents but part of a deeply embedded system of exclusion. From lack of representation in leadership to exclusive recruitment practices, financial barriers, and insufficient support systems, these obstacles prevent ethnic minority, disabled, and socio-economically

disadvantaged individuals from fully participating in and contributing to the heritage sector.

While national policies emphasise the need for greater diversity and inclusion, the gap between policy and practice remains significant, particularly in rural areas where organisations often lack the resources to implement robust inclusion initiatives. The recommendations outlined in this report provide a clear, evidence-based roadmap for heritage organisations to address these challenges and create a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable sector.

By increasing representation in leadership roles, reforming recruitment practices, addressing financial exclusion, and strengthening support systems for disabled employees, the sector can begin to break down the barriers that have prevented marginalised groups from accessing heritage careers. At the same time, by supporting rural organisations through regional collaborations and resource sharing, Scotland's heritage sector can ensure that diversity efforts are scalable and sustainable across the entire country.

Finally, the establishment of a sector-wide accountability framework will ensure that these changes are tracked, measured, and sustained over time. By holding organisations accountable for their diversity and inclusion efforts and encouraging cross-sector collaboration, the heritage sector can create lasting change that benefits both its workforce and the communities it serves.

The future of Scotland's heritage sector depends on its ability to diversify, innovate, and reflect the richness of Scotland's multicultural society. By implementing the recommendations in this report, the sector can move beyond rhetoric and make real progress toward becoming more inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the diverse communities that make up Scotland's rich heritage.

It is clear from the analysis of the findings of the data collected that the Improving Access Project was able to clearly identify the cultures, processes, and structures that discriminate people from the sector's workforce in Scotland and was able to identify good inclusive practice that can be embedded into wider sector practice to support transformative change. Future work should be focussed on embedding the recommendations into the heritage sector in Scotland.

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Appendices

Pre-project survey (June 2022)

List of questions asked

1. What type of organisation are you?
2. Are you a fair work employer?
3. What geographical location do you operate in?
4. Are you aware of Developing the Young Workforce and Young Persons Guarantee?
5. Which of the below do you currently provide?
 - a. Engagement with schools/collages around heritage careers
 - b. Individual work experience placements of no more than two weeks
 - c. Industry placements (extended work experience placements)
 - d. Paid placements, e.g. kickstart, community job funds, etc.
 - e. Paid internships/traineeships not linked to a qualification
 - f. Paid internships/traineeships linked to a qualification
 - g. Modern apprenticeships
 - h. Foundation apprenticeships
 - i. Graduate apprenticeships
 - j. Bespoke opportunities for those facing the greatest barriers
 - k. Volunteering
 - l. None
 - m. Other
6. Is your organisation able to offer all the opportunities that you want to offer?
7. What work areas do you currently provide opportunities in?
8. Do you have any partners in the delivery of any of the opportunities your organisation provides?
9. Are there suitable accredited frameworks in your area of work?
10. Do you have plans for providing work-based learning opportunities in future?
11. What future work-based learning opportunities do you plan to provide?
12. What barriers does your organisation face when trying to provide work-based learning opportunities?
13. Should there be a sector approach to work-based learning?
14. What are your organisational support needs for the provision of work-based learning opportunities?
15. Are you interested in finding out more about work-based learning opportunities?
16. Are you interested in taking part in further consultation?

Response breakdown

Organisation type

Organisation working fields were varied. Most respondents were museums or galleries (30% of answers) or heritage sites (15%). 12% were a heritage learning provider, 10% worked in archaeology, 10% were sector support organisations, 4% worked in historic landscape, and 2% worked in gardens and designed landscapes. Lastly, 17% worked in “other” which included library and archive, local authority, building preservation trust, cinema, and consultancy.

Fair work status

Most organisations classed themselves as Fair Work employers with a 45% response rate for yes. 22% of respondents were not Fair Work employers and 33% were unsure of what their status should be.

Geographical spread

The majority of responding organisations worked at a national level (28%) and in the central belt, with 14% based in Edinburgh, 10.5% based in Perth and Kinross, 9% based in Fife, 3.5% based in Glasgow, 2% in Lanarkshire and east Dunbartonshire, 2% in Ayrshire, 2% in West Lothian, 2% in East and mid Lothian, and 2% in Stirlingshire.

The rest of the organisations were based in Argyll and Bute (9%), in the North East (7%), Dumfries and Galloway (3.5%), Dundee and Angus (3.5%), Moray (2%), and Inverness and Central Highlands (2%).

Awareness of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and Young Persons Guarantee (YPG)

Most organisations (70%) were aware of DYW while the awareness rate for YPG was 50%.

Opportunities provided

- 76 employers provided volunteering opportunities
- 67 employers engaged with schools and/or colleges around heritage careers
- 43 employers provided industry placements and a further 43 provided paid placements such as kickstart and community jobs fund
- 39 employers provided paid internships and traineeships not linked to a qualification and a further 39 employers provided individual work placements of no more than 2 weeks
- 28 employers provided modern apprenticeships, and a further 28 employers provided bespoke opportunities for those facing barriers
- 19 employers provided paid internships and traineeships linked to a qualification

- 11 organisations provided graduate apprenticeships
- 7 organisations did not provide any opportunities
- It is worth noting that 12 organisations provided different types of placements such as YPG placements, research applied PhD opportunities, lifelong experiences with local groups, youth forum and digital heroes, D&G graduate scheme, NPA awards in construction, Robertson Trust internship, and the development of taster sessions and employability tours.

Organisational capacity

A vast majority of surveyed employers were not able to offer the opportunities that they wanted to due to a variety of barriers which included:

- Limited work routes
- Lack of funding
- Lack of capacity and staff
- Lack of space
- Undertaking specialised work which is unsuitable for unqualified people,
- Difficult access to location
- The nature of organisational funding and fixed terms roles making it difficult to plan
- Volunteer-led organisations being unable to offer employment opportunities
- The need for corporate support and buy in from senior colleagues to research the support on offer
- Modern Apprenticeships do not offer living wage in year 1, which is contradictory to some organisation's plans and restrictive to their wider aspirations
- The lack of information or knowledge on how to support opportunities without them being perceived as exploitative
- Lack of appropriate apprenticeship framework
- The difficulty to identify the best routes in and to establish communication with less well represented communities in a way that is not patronising or problematic.

Areas of work organisations provide opportunities in

- 52 organisations offered opportunities in **collections**,
- 43 organisations offered opportunities working with **communities**,
- 43 organisations offered opportunities working **front of house**,
- 39 organisations offered opportunities working in **events**,
- 35 organisations offered opportunities in **digital** work,
- 35 organisations offered opportunities working in **learning**,
- 31 organisations offered opportunities in **administration**,

- 31 organisations offered opportunities in **communications and media**,
- 26 organisations offered opportunities in **construction**,
- 22 organisations offered opportunities working in **archaeology**,
- 15 organisations offered opportunities in **IT**,
- 13 organisations offered opportunities in **business skills**, and
- 4 organisations did not offer any opportunities.

28 organisations provided other types of opportunities, including traditional building skills, engineering, estate management, archives and public engagement, palaeontology and geology, horticulture rural skills and gardening, building maintenance, planning, design and environmental assessment, technical non-construction, and volunteer supervision. An organisation had an intern undertaking an internal heritage impact assessment and another organisation was developing relationships with local schools, specialists and community groups.

Organisations working in partnership

The vast majority of respondents (61%) specified that they work in partnership to offer these opportunities. The organisations respondents worked in partnership with are:

- Developing the Young Workforce, Young Person's Guarantee, Skills Development Scotland
- Chamber of Commerce, Edinburgh Guarantee, and Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme
- Local schools
- Scottish Qualifications Agency
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Universities, Colleges, and Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities
- Local Authorities, job centres, and groups such as Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface (A&BTISI), Culture, Heritage & Arts, Argyll & the Isles (CHARTS), Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust
- Charities such as Keep Scotland Beautiful, Next Step Initiative and the Robertson Trust
- Enterprise and third sector support such as CEIS and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Umbrella bodies such as Museum Galleries Scotland, BEFS
- National Trust
- Local groups such as Dunoon Area Alliance, Argyll Construction Training Group
- Tacit
- Nautical Archaeology Society
- NAC

- Employability schemes such as The Ridge at Dunbar
- Department for Work and Pensions,
- Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
- Private sector and organisations such as John Brown Strone, Addyman Archaeology, Shipwrights, Birnam Art, Beatfrecks, and other clients and contractors
- Professional bodies such as Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), Landscape Institute, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA), Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC)
- Hub International
- Job centres.

Suitable accredited frameworks

Only 30% of respondents felt that the accredited frameworks in existence are suitable. 37% stated that there were gaps and a further 33% were unsure.

The main gaps are around the lack of awards for community volunteers similar to the arts award and the lack of a historic environment advisor. In terms of issues, some organisations could not offer accreditations to kick starters because the 6-months timeframe was too short, and others worked primarily with academic opportunities.

Plans for providing future work-based learning opportunities

Many survey respondents wanted to increase their work-based learning offer (36%) while 31% wanted to offer different areas and levels of work-based learning opportunities. 18% of surveyed employers wanted their offer to remain the same. 11% of employers did not offer work-based learning opportunities at the time of survey but wanted to in future. Lastly, 4% did not offer work-based learning opportunities nor did they plan to.

In terms of future work-based learning opportunities responses included:

- 72 employers sought to have **volunteering** opportunities in future
- 65 employers wanted to have engagement with schools and/or colleges in future
- 53 employers were looking at hosting **individual work experience placements** of no more than two weeks
- 51 employers sought to offer paid internships or traineeships linked to a qualification
- 51 employers wanted to offer **paid placements** such as Kickstart or Community Jobs Fund
- 49 employers were looking at offering **industry placements**
- 47 employers sought to offer **bespoke opportunities** for those facing barriers

- 44 employers wanted to offer a paid internship/traineeship not linked to a qualification
- 40 employers were looking at offering **modern apprenticeships** in future
- 27 employers sought to offer **foundation apprenticeships** in future
- 27 employers wanted to offer **graduate apprenticeships**
- 7 employers did not offer any opportunities.

Main organisational barriers for work-based learning

The main barriers deterring employers from offering work-based learning opportunities were funding, staffing resource, space, being inaccessible locally, the administrative burden, the difficulty prioritising this work, academic focus, navigating the accreditation with SQA, a lack of contacts, and a lack of achievable career paths.

Sector approach and support

The vast majority of survey respondents (67%) would like a sector approach to work-based learning. 27% of employers surveyed were unsure about whether or not they would want a sector approach, and 6% did not want one.

In terms of the support that organisations would like to receive to deliver work-based learning, the most cited were:

- Forming networks
- Creating a resource bank
- Developing careers education resources
- Advice hubs
- Training for staff
- Establishing a central portal to advertise opportunities.