RESEARCH STRATEGY
2023-28

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | **ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA**

HES RESEARCH STRATEGY 2023-28

VISION

Research is fundamental to our work at Historic Environment Scotland (HES). Through this Strategy we will channel and support our research activity to ensure that we drive innovation and best practice in understanding, caring for, and sharing Scotland's historic environment. Across this strategy and the work that we'll do to implement it, our vision is that:

> *By 2028, we will have answered our most pressing research questions, ensuring that we have the evidence we need to make effective decisions and support resilience across our sector. We will also have created the infrastructure and environment needed to sustain our research, and to allow our researchers to thrive.*

INTRODUCTION

We are a charity and public body leading the way in protecting, understanding, and sharing Scotland's historic environment, for today and the future.

What we do

• We are at the forefront of investigating and researching the historic environment, and addressing the impacts of climate change on its future.

• We help to develop the knowledge, skills, and materials that Scotland needs to look after our heritage.

• We make a strong contribution to the economy, and to building a fairer, more sustainable future for Scotland.

• We award millions of pounds each year to local communities to repair, revitalise and reuse their historic environment, helping to foster social cohesion and a strong sense of place.

• We enable change to our most significant heritage assets while providing the protection they need through designations and consents, ensuring this resource is available for generations to come.

• We support the conservation and reuse of Scotland's historic environment by providing advice and technical expertise

• We seek to grow understanding of our historic assets, the benefits they bring and the diverse stories that make up our shared histories.

• We look after over 300 sites of national importance, more than 41,000 objects in the collections and five million items of archive on behalf of the people of Scotland.

• In every aspect of our work we strive to follow our five organisational values – we are collaborative, professional, innovative, open, and respectful.

At HES, our research falls into two categories. We conduct operational research which directly informs day-to-day decisions: for instance, research that helps us to make specific conservation decisions, or improve interpretation at a site. And we conduct strategic research, which aims to understand emerging or future trends, or trial new ways of doing things. Both bring considerable value to our organisation, supporting all of the areas of activity outlined above.

Who this strategy is for

This strategy governs the strategic research we undertake as an organisation. This document is for researchers at HES looking to undertake such research, and for any researchers outside our organisation who might have an interest in partnering with us. It covers the period 2023-28, and lays out the vision, principles, priorities, and outcomes that will guide our research activity and research partnerships.

Definition of research

Research can be defined in many ways, and at HES we undertake and enable a wide variety of research activities. For the purposes of this strategy, we have defined research as *any creative or systematic work undertaken to contribute to a body of knowledge or set of practices, or to devise new applications of available knowledge*.[1]

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This Research Strategy is informed by *Our Place in Time: Scotland's Historic Environment Strategy*. Within HES, the Strategy sits below *Heritage for All* - our Corporate Plan 2022-25 - and will align research activity to our organisation's strategic outcomes. These outcomes are:

1. The historic environment makes a real difference to people's lives
2. The historic environment is looked after, protected, and managed for the generations to come
3. The historic environment makes a broader contribution to the economy of Scotland and its people
4. The historic environment inspires a creative and vibrant Scotland
5. The historic environment is cared for and championed by a high- performing organisation

In helping us to deliver HES's corporate objectives, this strategy complements and supports other organisational plans, including our International, Digital, and People [internal only] Strategies, our Climate Action Plan and Equality Outcomes, and Scotland's Archaeology Strategy.

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[1] This definition is adapted from the OECD's *Frascati Manual 2015: Guidelines for Collecting and Reporting Data on Research and Experimental Development*.

HES RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Why we undertake research

The Historic Environment Scotland Act 2014 gives HES the function of understanding and interpreting the historic environment, and further commits us to managing our collections and archives as a national resource for reference, study, and research. Research therefore lies at the heart of what we do as an organisation, and plays a vital role both in providing us with the evidence to inform decision-making, and in allowing others to engage with, and enjoy, Scotland's historic environment.

As the lead public body for Scotland's historic environment, we also have a strong role to play in policy formation, advocacy, capacity building, and championing good practice. Research is fundamental to all these roles. This Strategy will help us to identify the big issues facing our sector, ensure our research helps us to identify emerging challenges and opportunities, and aid us in sharing our learning with others. This includes identifying and sharing insight on future trends, trialling adoption of new technologies or processes, and working in partnership with others.

What we research

Research is vital not just to our interpretation of the past, but to the decisions made about the future. Protecting and promoting the historic environment requires us to understand it, the benefits it can bring, and how these benefits can be realised sustainably.

Our main areas of research fall into four categories:

- research that helps us to understand and value the significance of the historic environment.
- research into the contribution that the historic environment makes - or can make - to wider society.
- technical research that helps us and others to conserve and manage the historic environment.
- research that helps us to improve access, participation, or engagement with the historic environment.

More details on our research areas, including case studies of some of our most recent projects, can be found on our website.

How we research

We research in a variety of ways. We work by ourselves and collaborate with others, and commission and grant-fund research. Our research partnerships are diverse, as we work not just with academics and commercial research companies, but with other public bodies, SMEs, third sector and community groups, and with international partners. We also provide in-kind support to enable research undertaken by others, through the provision of data or sites for study, and access to technical and scientific equipment.

How we share our findings

We share our research internally and externally, and through a variety of means depending on the impacts that we want to achieve. We:

- publish freely accessible technical advice, guidance notes, and open-access research reports.
- make information, and any other relevant material resulting from our research, available to everyone through our online services and search room facilities.
- use our research in site-based interpretation, including exhibitions, graphics, and tours.
- contribute to peer-reviewed academic journals and monographs.
- present at conferences, and run our own knowledge-sharing events.
- update and improve the national records we hold.
- share our work with the media, and via our social media channels.
- produce publications that we sell commercially.
- develop and deliver training courses for professionals, and learning events for members of the public.

How we support our research

Due to our research expertise we are recognised as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO) by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). This gives us the ability to apply for funding - as a lead institution, or in collaboration with universities or other IROs - to any of the UKRI Research Councils. We also have a track record of being awarded funding from other major research funders, including the European Commission, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and the Leverhulme Trust. We are committed to utilising our IRO status to support our research activity and partnerships, and will develop a Research Fundraising Plan to support delivery of this Strategy.

Our research is supported by a strong infrastructure base. The Engine Shed, our dedicated building conservation centre in Stirling, acts as a hub for our digital innovation and heritage science research, as well as delivery of our teaching programmes. We have further applied conservation facilities in Edinburgh, as well as a publicly accessible archive and library. We also have a rich set of digital resources to support our research and to help us share our findings, from Scotland's National Record of the Historic Environment to PastMap.

RESEARCH PRINCIPLES

Ethics and Integrity

We are committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity and ethics in our research activity. All our research is guided by the principles set out in our Code of Good Practice in Research, and by internal policies and procedures governing research ethics. We will monitor and update these documents over the life of this new strategy.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Many of the challenges we face in the historic environment sector are 'wicked problems', felt across nations and policy areas and with no single, obvious answer. Partnership working is therefore crucial to our ability to deliver high-quality, impactful research. We will look to build partnerships to support and drive our work, and will use our research findings to set standards and encourage best practice and innovation across the heritage sector.

Equalities and Diversity

Tackling inequality and promoting diversity and inclusion will be core considerations across our research activity. In line with our Equality Outcomes, we are committed to broadening our partnerships and the audiences for our research, and to co-designing and co-producing our research with community partners.

Knowledge Exchange

We recognise that effective knowledge exchange is not just about how we share our research with others, but about working with partners and stakeholders - including within our own organisation - to identify and design research projects from the beginning. It is also about supporting researchers outside of HES to create impacts from their work, where this can bring benefits to Scotland's historic environment. We are committed to growing knowledge exchange across the historic environment sector and beyond, and this strategy will help to support that ambition.

Whenever we begin a research project, we will:

- Consider the multiple ways in which our research could be used, and the different groups that will have an interest in our findings.
- Seek to maximise the impacts that results from our research: for HES as an organisation, for the historic environment sector, and for wider policy agendas and societal challenges.
- Recognise that knowledge exchange involves secondments, placements, consultancy, and continuing personal development as well as formal research, and involves working with industry as well as academic or public and third sector partners.
- Encourage researchers to build time into their research plans to identify, and work with, their key stakeholders, thus creating more opportunities for enhancing our networks and the funding and resources available for research.
- Think beyond traditional methods of publication and dissemination, and in ways that are appropriate to the context and audiences we want to reach, and to the impacts we want to have.
- Consider the intellectual property ('IP') issues that might stem from our research, including who should own or have rights to use it.
- Make our work as open and accessible as possible, both in terms of making our findings freely available and in a format that caters for different accessibility needs
- Consider and ensure the sustainability of our work, both in terms of minimising our environmental impacts and in promoting the long-term storage and accessibility of our research results.

PRIORITIES

Over the life of this strategy we will focus our research activity on the following thematic areas, and the research needs we have identified under them. By targeting our research at the areas where we most need evidence or impact, we will drive maximum benefit from our activity. These priorities will inform a key performance indicator, which will help us to understand the difference our research is making. However, they should not be seen as fixed and unchanging, and will be periodically reviewed and – if necessary – amended depending on changing circumstances.

Addressing Climate Change

Research under this priority will directly support delivery of our Climate Action Plan, supporting HES and the historic environment sector to move to net zero, and championing the use of low carbon traditional skills and materials.

What do we want to know?	Why?	When?	Who do we need to work with?	Corporate Plan Outcome(s)	Links to corporate of sector strategies or initiatives?	Research Type
How can we improve our existing guidance, advice, and policies about managing change in the historic environment, and where do we need new advice, guidance and policies to account for the climate emergency?	Addressing the climate emergency requires major transformations in our society. This means it's more important than ever that we offer the right advice, guidance, and regulation for the historic environment.		Scottish Government, key agencies, stakeholders, and the public	2 & 5	HEPS, CAP	Desk-based research, workshops, interviews, and surveys

How can we effectively monitor and assess the physical impacts of climate change, and adapt the historic environment to be resilient in the face of these impacts?	The impacts of climate change are happening now. We therefore need to ensure that we understand these effects, and how we might reduce their impact.	2022-28	Scottish Govt departments, Commercial, Historic Environment sector, Land Managers (e.g. Forest and Land), Nature Scot, Dynamic Coast, Universities	2		Desk-based; AI-lead, field survey, practice-based research
How can we support the maintenance, retrofit and reuse of traditional buildings, to strengthen the case for avoided and embodied carbon, and support Scotland's move to net zero?	The historic environment is a sustainable and low carbon resource. But to keep our historic assets in use, we need to understand how we can promote the materials and skills that created and maintain them, and how we can adapt buildings to face new circumstances.	2022-28	Sector bodies, innovation centres, universities, research councils	2, 3	Climate Action Plan, objective "Circular Economy"	Technical research, desk-based research, research partnerships

What do we want to know?	Why?	When?	Who do we need to work with?	Corporate Plan Outcome(s)	Links to corporate of sector strategies or initiatives?	Research Type
How can we encourage and support low-carbon tourism models?	If we are to reduce our emissions as an organisation, it will be vital to reduce the carbon emissions of visitors to our sites.		Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Universities, other public bodies	2, 3, 5	Climate Action Plan 'Sustainable Tourism' priority	Desk based research, pilot programmes

Strengthening Communities

Research under this priority will help us to use the historic environment to build the wealth and wellbeing of Scotland's communities, and empower communities to take control of, or influence decisions about, their heritage.

What do we want to know?	Why?	When?	Who do we need to work with?	Corporate Plan Outcome(s)	Links to corporate of sector strategies or initiatives?	Research Type
What contribution can the historic environment make to regeneration and placemaking, and how can we develop participatory models to support the realisation of these outcomes?	The historic environment is an economic resource for local communities. But to fully realise these benefits, we must put communities at the heart of decision-making and leadership.	2023-25	Local heritage bodies, community wealth building experts, specific named projects with expertise in the area	1, 3	Outcomes 1,2 and 3 in corporate plan, KPI 3	Desk-based, practice based

What do communities value about their heritage, and how can we adapt our services or ways of working to better account for these needs?	If we are to be a high-performing and representative organisation, then we need to know what communities value about their heritage, and how we can better represent this in our work.	2022-2025	NLHF, Historic England, Enterprise Agencies, MGS, DTAS		1, 4, 5	HEPS, ICH Action Plan, Equality Outcomes	Surveys, workshops, events, media campaign

Informing Policy and Practice

Research under this priority will help to ensure that Scotland's historic environment sector has the evidence needed for effective decision making, advocacy, and action. It will also help us to understand our audiences and markets, in order to support our commercial activities.

What do we want to know?	Why?	When?	Who do we need to work with?	Corporate Plan Outcome(s)	Links to corporate of sector strategies or initiatives?	Research Type
What future trends are likely to impact Scotland's historic environment and the organisations in our sector, and how can we share insights gained from horizon scanning to inform decision making?	As the lead public body for Scotland's historic environment, it is vital that we understand the trends affecting our sector, and share this with others.	2022-28	Universities, commercial research firms, sector and member organisations	5	OPiT, HES Policy Network	Desk-based research, surveys, workshops, focus groups
How does the historic environment contribute to Scotland's natural capital, and how can we better integrate non-economic values (e.g., social and cultural capital) into decision making about the historic environment?	Understanding the value of the historic environment, and communicating this effectively, is central to our ability to both maintain it and encourage investment	2023-25	Historic England, CADW, Scottish Government, universities	2	OPiT, CAP	Desk-based research, commissioned research, research partnerships

What data do we need to collect and access to allow us to make effective evidence-based decisions, and to address our priority challenges?	Data is central to our ability to answer our evidence needs, and to informed decision making, but we don't currently have the right data for some key areas.	2022-24	HES Policy Network	5	Corporate Plan	Desk-based research
How can we improve our recording, designation, and planning, consents and advice services?	To give us an evidence-base for decision-making, prioritisation, continuous improvement and to ensure that we are providing what the people of Scotland and the sector want	Annual process	Local authorities, community groups, Historic England	1, 5	OPiT, HEPS	Desk-based research, surveys, workshops, focus groups
How can we gain a better understanding of the organisations that make up Scotland's heritage sector?	Understanding the organisations that make up our sector is vital if we are to effectively plan skills provision, and provide the right kind of organisational support	2023-25	NLHF and other heritage funders, Scottish Government	3, 5	OPiT, SIP, CAP	Desk-based research, data analysis

| What are the future skills needs for Scotland's historic environment? | Ensuring that we have the right skills is essential to delivering our sector's vision and outcomes | 2022-23 | Scottish Government, SDS, SFC | 2, 3 | SIP, CAP, Tourism Strategy | Desk-based research, data analysis |

Tackling Inequality

Research under this priority will help to widen participation and engagement with heritage, support wellbeing, and help us to better reflect the diversity of modern Scotland in our work. Activity here will directly support delivery of our Equality Outcomes.

What do we want to know?	Why?	When?	Who do we need to work with?	Corporate Plan Outcome(s)	Links to corporate of sector strategies or initiatives?	Research Type
How can we design our services so that the wellbeing benefits of the historic environment are felt equally by everyone, regardless of background	The promotion of wellbeing is central to our work, but the benefits of heritage are not currently felt by all.	2021-25	Five Nations' Heritage Wellbeing Group	1, 5	HES Equality Outcomes 2021-25	Research commission, desk research
What do we need to do to build a more diverse workforce across our sector? What are the barriers preventing access to work and	Overcoming barriers to work is essential if we are to fill our skills gaps, whilst ensuring that as many people as	2024-26	Scottish Government, SDS, SFC, universities and colleges	3, 5	HES Equality Outcomes 2021-25 , SIP	Desk-based research, research partnerships

skills, and how can we overcome them?	possible can benefit from heritage					
What histories are hidden in our current representation of the historic environment	If Scotland's historic environment is to better represent the diversity of modern Scotland, we need to tell more inclusive and diverse stories about it	2022-25	Communities of interest and geography, but particularly groups with protected characteristics or from disadvantaged backgrounds	1, 4	HES Equality Outcomes 2021-25	Research commission, desk research, postdoctoral research
How can we apply social prescribing to our work at HES?	Evidence shows that heritage can promote health and wellbeing. But to properly unlock these benefits we need to understand how we can implement good practice in our operations	2022-24	Alzheimers Scotland, University of Edinburgh	1	HES Equality Outcomes 2021-25	Practice-based project

Driving Innovation

Research under this priority will test new technologies, processes, or methodologies that can increase efficiency and productivity within the heritage sector. It may also help to create new products or services.

What do we want to know?	Why?	When?	Who do we need to work with?	Corporate Plan Outcome(s)	Links to corporate of sector strategies or initiatives?	Research Type
What are the opportunities for innovation in our sector, and how can we engage the sector through innovation to address future skills challenges or improve productivity	We need to understand future challenges and opportunities – industry 4.0, building standards, net zero aspirations - and how they are likely to affect our sector	2022-23	Innovation Centres, universities, colleges, Scottish Funding Council, businesses	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Skills Investment Plan, Action 1.3, Archaeology Strategy	Desk-based research, workshops, interviews, and surveys
How can we create outstanding visitor experiences informed by research and enabled by new technology, including infrastructure and communication modes?	To continue to offer an outstanding sector leading visitor offer	Ongoing	ASVA, ALVA, Visit Scotland, sector bodies, innovation centres, universities	3, 4	Visitor Strategy Objective 2	Practice based research, PhD and Masters research
How can we improve access to our records, collections, research, and data, so that more people	To allow everyone to access the information we have about the historic	2022-24	TPXImpact, SG, Users	1, 3, 4, 5		Creation of a Digital Experience Platform through

can use and benefit from them?	environment easily in one place					Heritage Hub (working title)
How can we use scientific, technical, and digital research to improve the management of, and access to, heritage sites?	We need to explore innovative ways of realising the benefits that heritage sites bring to visitors and communities, and find new ways to support access.	2022-24	Universities, innovation centres, private sector	2, 3, 4, 5	Visitor Strategy	Pilot programmes, applied research
How can we improve the way we share learning from our research and innovation, to encourage and inspire good practice across the sector?	We innovate across HES, and as lead public body for Scotland's historic environment want to share our learning from this both across our sector and beyond.	Ongoing	Sector bodies (e.g. BEFS, ASVA, ALVA, Visit Scotland, MGS)	3, 4, 5	OPiT	Desk-based research, interviews, surveys, workshops

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

Delivery of this Strategy will be guided by an implementation plan, with yearly deliverables. This will be a live document, capable of adapting to changing circumstances and evidence needs. Responsibility for delivering this plan and related activities will sit with the HES Research Forum – an internal group of staff comprising researchers and managers drawn from across our research teams. The group will:

- set and deliver activities to support capacity building and knowledge exchange,
- work to identify gaps in our evidence base and opportunities for research collaboration internally and externally,
- provide peer review of research proposals and funding bids, including acting as an ethics advisory board where necessary,
- champion research across our organisation, and externally.

We will also work with our teams to collate yearly research plans, based on existing directorate and team plans. This will help us to monitor activity against our priorities, and demonstrate success in meeting our evidence needs.

Our Researchers

People lie at the heart of discovery and innovation. Ensuring that our researchers have the infrastructure and skills needed to deliver world-class research will therefore be central to realising this strategy's vision. In line with the HES People Strategy, we will work with our researchers to identify and deliver activities to build our organisational research capacity and support networks. This activity will inform our implementation plan and key performance indicators.

MEASURING IMPACT

To measure the success of this Strategy and to ensure the impact of our research, we have identified some high-level key performance indicators (KPIs) which will help us to identify and measure success. These KPIs do not stand alone, as they each assist in delivering the strategic priorities of OPiT, our Corporate Plan outcomes, and our Annual Operating Plans. We will use a variety of methods to understand and report on our research activity, including qualitative case studies as well as quantitative data.

KPI 1 – Resourcing our Research

In line with UK and Scottish Government targets for research and innovation, we will continue to spend at least 2.4% of our budget on R&D activity.

KPI 2 – Targeting Investment

We will maintain our status as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO), ensuring that we bring in at least £500,000 to support our research activity over the life of the strategy.

KPI 3 – Informing Evidence Needs

By the end of the 5-year period covered by this Strategy, we will have addressed at least 60% of the identified evidence needs under our research priority headings.

KPI 4 – Enhancing our Research Environment

We will successfully deliver our yearly implementation activity, focused on building a high-performing research environment and culture.

Historic Environment Scotland is the lead public body established to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment.

We are committed to ensuring this publication is accessible to everyone. If you need it supplied in a different format or language, please get in touch.