

Skills Investment Plan

for Scotland's historic environment

Year Two



This report was developed by the Skills and Expertise Group responsible for driving the Skills Investment Plan for Scotland's Historic Environment with support from the wider heritage and related sectors:

Historic Environment Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, Archaeology Scotland, the Institute of Conservation, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland, Archives Records Association, Built Environment Forum Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland, the Landscape Institute, Lantra, Industrial Museums Scotland, Go Industrial, the Construction Industry Training Board, the chartered Institute of Building, Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the National Heritage Science Forum, Skills Development Scotland, and Developing the Young Workforce.

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Reflections from the National Trust for Scotland: Skills provision in heritage today and in the future

The second report on progress of Scotland's Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment provides us all with an opportunity to reflect on our collective progress in addressing the many challenging issues before us.

In the [National Trust for Scotland \(NTS\)](#) we put enormous effort into caring for the things we love, such as the decorative stonework atop Fyvie Castle's historic conical roof, or the return of Walter Blackie's original writing desk to his Mackintosh-designed dwelling, the Hill House. Conservation requires the alignment of complex financial arrangements, detailed project programming and provision of many specialist skills which are dependent upon the critical relationship between a sustainable, skilled workforce and our charity's mission – to be responsible for nature, beauty and heritage for everyone. Without this we would simply cease to function.

Our responsibilities for some of Scotland's most important heritage demands we aspire to the highest of standards – applicable to all locations, be they the grandest of castles or the most modest vernacular buildings. As well as developing our own staff through our Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship programmes and other training and continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, our widespread project activity at NTS provides many opportunities to learn 'on the job'.

We recognise at the Trust that there is so much more to heritage than just the built environment that we all care for. We have twenty job families across our charity and have been investing in building career pathways to engage the future generations to consider a career in heritage. Through creative collaborations with training providers, national charities and industry partners we have been able to create exciting new opportunities such as our TikTok Apprentice, Trainee Archaeologist, Rural Skills

and Countryside Ranger apprenticeships. Coupled with a focus on widening access with working alongside [DFN Project Search](#) and [Career Ready](#).

This report reminds us of the challenges ahead if we are to ensure the sustainability of our future workforce. Skills shortages remain acute, coordination across activity is complex, and in a competitive funding environment we often struggle to articulate our conservation work to a net zero and economic benefit narrative. While we, rightly, celebrate the progress made, we must also speak as a unified sector, sharing our concerns with the country's policy and decision makers so that we encourage them to help us secure the progress we all want to see.

Thank you to all the groups and individuals who give up their time to help achieve the great progress as illustrated.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bryan Dickson".

Bryan Dickson, Head of Buildings Conservation Policy, National Trust for Scotland.

Introduction

The [Skills Investment Plan \(SIP\)](#) is a sector-wide strategy designed to ensure Scotland has the workforce, skills, and capacity needed to care for, manage, and promote its historic environment. It provides a collective framework requiring coordinated effort across, sector bodies, training providers, employers, and key stakeholders

The SIP aims to:

- Support and nurture the skills, knowledge, and expertise required across the diverse historic environment workforce.
- Ensure Scotland can protect, manage, and promote its heritage now and in the future.
- Align with [Our Past, Our Future](#), the national strategy for the historic environment.

Our focus

The plan spans a wide range of disciplines (called pillars), including:

SIP Footprint: 10 pillars

- Archaeology
- Architecture, engineering, planning, surveying in a heritage context and with a conservation approach
- Archives and libraries
- Conservation of art and artefacts
- Heritage science
- Heritage tourism
- Historic landscapes and gardens
- Industrial heritage
- Museums and galleries
- Traditional building skills and materials

Across these pillars, the SIP highlights eleven focus areas needed for a sustainable skills system for the historic environment:



Securing sustainable resources is vital to support coordination and delivery. Without a resource plan and adequate resources, the priority actions will not be delivered.



Strong sector leadership. With a decrease in skills bodies to support the sector, many key sector areas no longer have a skills body that can advocate or act as a custodian of national occupation standards, nor support the development of new qualifications and frameworks. Strong sector leadership for skills is required to facilitate delivery and provide a forum for collaboration.



Collaboration and alignment. Building creative partnerships across and beyond the sector is needed to maximise impact rather than duplicate activity. To address gaps in provision and align resources and effort, key stakeholders need to collaborate, and mechanisms for this collaboration need to be established.



Data-informed decision making and reporting. The sector needs better data in a useful format which can act as a single source of truth and help plan, advocate, and monitor provision.



Stabilising, maintaining and growing specialist technical skills. We need to be able to identify these specialist skills, establish a mechanism for assessing the 'health' of these skills, and have a structure in place to support succession planning and knowledge sharing.



Accreditation and standards. Promoting existing accreditation schemes, incentivising professionals

to pursue accreditation, and reviewing the effectiveness of these programmes where accreditation exists. Also, ensuring standards of training provision and competency of learners in instances where formal qualifications or professional accreditation are lacking.



Attracting future talent and developing inclusive progressive pathways. The sector needs clear, progressive pathways to support those who have yet to join the sector, as well as current employees. This includes more vocational pathways and a focus on improving access to the workforce by addressing inequality, as well as addressing sector culture and practices that can lead to exclusion.



Accessibility of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Focusing on provision for SMEs, volunteers, and skills 'cold spots' across Scotland.



Improving digital literacy, application and solutions. Digital methods were identified as the number one skills need and/or deficit across the roundtables, encompassing AI and improving digital literacy, applications and solutions.



Skills to address the climate crisis. The historic environment has a vital role to play in supporting good, green jobs and promoting low-carbon materials and skills. However, to accomplish this, we need to build capacity and upscale provision.



Advocating for the sector and sector skills.

Delivering the Plan

A dedicated Skills and Expertise Group made up of industry representatives oversee the delivery of the plan through: raising the profile of skills; providing a space for dialogue and communication; identifying collaborative solutions; and monitoring activity to establish data baselines to aid decision-making.

Goals of this report

Activity has been delivered in all the ten pillar areas in the 2025-2026 financial year. This report provides examples of the work heritage bodies, employers, training providers and other stakeholders are doing to deliver the SIP and strengthen the heritage skills ecosystem in Scotland.

Through case studies, data analysis, and key summaries against the SIP priorities and pillars, this report will:

- Assess the success of the SIP over the past year.
- Assess progress of the SIP since the previous year.
- Identify areas for growth.
- Set goals for year three of the SIP.

It is also a tool both for transparency and for advocacy. In this report, people will see for themselves how organisations across Scotland are working to improve development opportunities for skills and create pathways into heritage careers. They can use the information in this report to advocate for their own skills areas and get inspiration from the case studies and activity reported here to build and deliver their own measures to support heritage skills in Scotland.



Visual summary



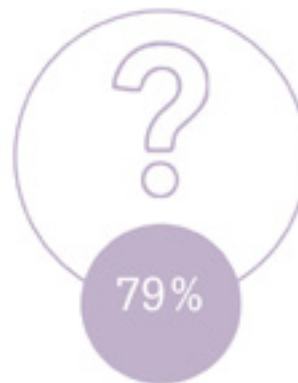
£25.5 Million granted in funding for projects with skills elements.



6766 work-based learning enrolments.



41765 student enrolments onto potential pipeline courses.



79% of employers facing skills and knowledge gaps.



Over 7000 people took part in careers awareness activities.



Only 12% of heritage organisations reported to use anonymised recruitment processes to reduce bias during hiring.

Heritage skills

The scene so far

The second year of delivery for the Skills Investment Plan has been a year of growth in many areas, but also of continuing issues facing heritage skills and the future workforce. Year 2 represents a period of tangible and meaningful progress towards the development of a stronger system for heritage skills. We are beginning to see improved coordination, evidence-driven planning, clearer pathways into the sector, and the potential for growing training infrastructure. The year ahead offers a pivotal moment to strengthen system leadership and infrastructure and consolidate Scotland's national capability to deliver a resilient, skilled, and future-ready heritage workforce. It will require strong leadership, advocacy and sustainable investment—but the constituent parts for a stronger system already exist. We've been gathering data to establish a baseline of evidence for the sector to monitor the progress we are making, assess the health of heritage skills, help inform decision-making, and to support collective action to address challenges and continue to grow.

Skills gaps

The second bi-annual Employers' Survey took place in June 2025. Whilst overall employers rated the health of the eleven SIP areas of focus as adequate, several areas of growth were also identified. 79% of employers surveyed said they are experiencing skills and knowledge gaps, 65% of whom expect this to have a 'considerable' or 'huge' impact on their organisation. 46% of employers stated they do not have the skills they need. The biggest skills gaps were identified in traditional and specialist skills (54%) and IT and digital skills (44%).

The biggest barriers to closing these skills gaps (as identified by employers) are funding, access to training, and clear professional pathways. 42% of employers cannot access the training provision they need or want, and 49% feel that entry and progression routes are unclear. Suggested solutions include: accredited courses, mentorship, increased awareness among young people, accessible grants, and more paid apprenticeships, especially in rural areas. Meanwhile, 68% of employers are actively promoting diversity and inclusion within the workforce, including: staff training on inclusion, anti-racism and/or unconscious bias (46%); inclusive recruitment practices (42%); and promoting diverse organisational policies and values (40%).

Further and higher education

In an analysis of the further (FE) and higher (HE) education courses (related to the ten pillars of the SIP) that could provide a pipeline for the historic environment sector, we found that a total of 41,765 students enrolled in potential pipeline courses for the heritage sector in the 2024-2025 academic year. This is a slight increase (0.2%) from the previous year.

Courses where enrolment increased, include:

- archaeology
- heritage studies

- landscape design
- building (undergraduate)
- planning (postgraduate)
- and information services (undergraduate).

Robert Gordon University also introduced a postgraduate qualification in information services, which is a key pipeline for archives, libraries, museums and galleries.

Courses where there were less enrolments in 2024/25 include:

- forensic and archaeological sciences
- architecture
- planning (undergraduate)
- building (postgraduate)
- tourism, transport and travel
- and civil engineering.

For the first time this year we have also gathered data on the gender of students enrolling into universities to assess gender balance in sector pipelines.

Table 1: Gender statistics of students enrolled onto key university courses for the heritage sector in the 2024/25 academic year.

Study area	Female enrolments	Male enrolments	‘Unknown’ enrolments
Architecture	2500	3340	55
Historical philosophical and religious studies	7239	4390	130
Engineering and technical	4465	15175	120
Physical sciences*	3670	4380	65
Business and management**	17935	19790	50
Media, journalism and communications***	3395	1960	45

*Including courses in forensic and archaeological sciences.

**Including courses in tourism, transport and travel.

***Including courses in information services.

However, because these Scottish-specific figures relate to overarching subject areas (called CAH 01 Level Subjects), they include admissions to courses that aren't necessarily pipelines for the heritage sector. Open data on gender of admission to our specific pipeline courses (CAH 03 Level) are only available as combined totals for the UK. So, whilst this data can offer some indication of trends, it does not show the definitive gender breakdown of enrolments in Scotland to key courses for the heritage sector workforce and career pathways. Gathering data at this level shall be pursued as a goal for Year 3.

At the college level, enrolments onto key courses increased by 2.6% in 2024/25, mostly in courses relevant to the traditional building skills and materials SIP pillar, including construction-related courses, building maintenance and services, civil engineering, metal/wood working and arts and crafts courses. Arts/culture/heritage administration also saw more students enrolled in 2024/25.

Historic landscapes and gardens however are seeing fewer enrolments into related courses, including: general agriculture/horticulture; amenity horticulture; gardening/floristry; and environmental protection/conservation. Other pillars including archaeology, architecture, engineering, planning and surveying (AEPS), and heritage tourism are also seeing fewer enrolments in key courses including: built environment, building design/architecture, construction management and property surveying/planning/development. Glass/ceramics/stone crafts are also seeing fewer enrolments.

It is important to note that it is not clear whether the curriculum content for FE/HE provision includes content relevant to the historic environment. To help better define our formal education pipeline we have been working with two [Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities](#) postgraduate interns to assess the level of heritage conservation content within key courses in further and higher education. The first research project assessed architecture, engineering, planning and surveying courses and determined that provision has been declining since 2020 across all disciplines, with particularly sharp losses in planning (-30%) and building (-15%). These two disciplines also see the lowest student enrolments overall in architecture, engineering, planning and surveying, with planning forming only 2% of enrolments into built environment courses in 2023/24. This coincides with planning enrolments halving at Heriot-Watt University, and Robert Gordon University discontinuing its building surveying degree. Meanwhile enrolments to architecture courses declined by 11% between 2020-2024, and engineering decreased by 14%.

There is increasing regional concentration in the Central Belt, with the closure of fragile specialist courses. In the North and Highlands region, only 50 students enrolled on the [University of the Highlands and Islands' \(UHI\)](#) architecture course. Heritage and conservation content remains unevenly embedded in mainstream curricula, constrained by staff expertise, accreditation barriers and inflexible course structures, despite strong institutional willingness to engage. The report concludes that without intervention, Scotland risks a loss of critical expertise, and recommends mainstreaming heritage and retrofit across all built environment courses, strengthening at-risk disciplines, expanding regional training hubs, supporting staff development and accreditation, and better aligning heritage skills with national innovation and climate priorities. A second research project assessing conservation content within construction courses is currently underway.

Work-based learning

There were 6766 work-based learning opportunities taken up in 2025/26, a 4.3% increase from 2024/25. This increase is partially because of the inclusion of data from more partners, including [Museums Galleries Scotland \(MGS\)](#) and the [National Trust for Scotland \(NTS\)](#). [Historic Environment Scotland \(HES\)](#) has supported 123 work-based learning placements (50.4% increase from last year), including 40 more stonemasonry apprentices. MGS trained 37 learners in skills including leadership, museum gallery technicians, digital marketing and management, whilst NTS provided 38 opportunities in areas including: administration, cultural venue operations, procurement, digital marketing, countryside management, hospitality, horticulture, rural skills, archaeology, nature conservation, digital documentation and more.

Funding

£25,510,507 has been invested through total grant awards in 119 skills projects in Scotland by funders: HES, [the National Lottery Heritage Fund \(NLHF\)](#), MGS, and the [Scottish Government](#). This is a 14.7% increase from funding for skills projects last year. The number of skills projects funded also increased by 56.5%.

HES issued a total of £12,536,622 in grant aid across 49 projects which contain skills training and development elements (of which a minimum of £1,249,547 was committed directly to skills activity). This included projects to support qualification and apprenticeship development, and the delivery of continuing professional development (CPD) and employability opportunities. The NLHF awarded a total of £11,353,599 across 32 projects, including climate leadership, youth skills development, future workforce development, health and wellbeing initiatives, community history and greenspaces. MGS awarded £863,362 to projects with a skills element, including projects focusing on marginalised and underrepresented groups, collection care and maintenance, learning through active conservation works, volunteering programmes, and leadership training. The Scottish Government also awarded £200,000 through MGS's [Museum Futures](#) project.

Our priorities

Discover the activity the sector had taken over this past year to meet out three priorities: building capacity and growing provision; attracting future talent and improving access; and fostering innovation.



Priority Theme 1:

Building capacity and growing provision



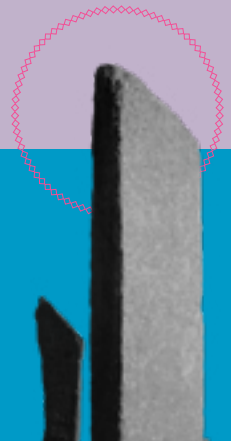
Priority Theme 2:

Attracting future talent and improving access



Priority Theme 3:

Fostering innovation



Priority 1

Building capacity and growing provision

Overall focus: strengthening and expanding the historic environment's skills ecosystem across the 10 areas of the SIP footprint, increasing specialist skills supply, and ensuring sustainable resources for the sector. There are five actions that sit under this priority:

1. Develop a framework for succession planning and knowledge sharing.
2. Align, develop, and accredit progressive CPD provision ensuring national availability.
3. Build conservation awareness in key stakeholders.
4. Build capacity in the sector.
5. Support sustainable organisations.

See the key activity and progress in each of these five actions over the past year, below.



Image: NTS staff and thatchers at Bachelors Club, Ayrshire. Courtesy of NTS.

Develop a framework for succession planning and knowledge sharing

A methodology has been developed for **assessing skills at risk** (SAR). The [Institute of Conservation \(Icon\)](#) has secured [Pilgrim Trust](#) funding to pilot the methodology, initially focusing on industrial heritage and textiles. HES will pilot the SAR methodology with traditional building skills from April 2026, with scope to extend across the SIP pillars. This will provide a framework for succession planning.

Align, develop and accredit progressive CPD provision

Discussions are ongoing with funders on using grant conditions and community benefit clauses to drive **local skills development** and CPD.

Work is underway to align and signpost existing activity with **career pathway development**, with targeted focus on areas where pathways remain fragmented (including traditional building skills, industrial heritage, conservation, landscapes and gardens). Local partners are being supported to align skills activity to create local pathways.

New qualifications are being developed to address gaps, particularly in archaeology, industrial heritage and conservation.

The architecture, engineering, planning and surveying delivery group is initiating conversations across the professions and trades to explore better collaboration and alignment in skills development activity.

Build conservation awareness in key stakeholders

A **modular conservation training programme** is being developed, aimed at planners and other key audiences, with the first module successfully piloted to 60 planners from City of Glasgow Council and Highland Council in January 2026.

We are considering findings of research into the level of conservation and retrofit content in architecture, engineering, planning and surveying content to support embedding conservation skills more systematically in formal education routes.

Build capacity in the sector to deliver training

Significant progress on **qualification and apprenticeship development**, including: new qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks for archaeology in development; and consultation on a new qualification endorsed by the Institute of Conservation, in conservation.

Expansion of **training infrastructure**, including Scottish Canals and HES development of Lock 16 (Falkirk) as a national training centre for traditional building, canal and industrial heritage skills.

Museums and Galleries Scotland **expanded assessment centre delivery** to include management Modern Apprenticeships, complementing existing provision of digital marketing and Museums and Galleries Technician apprenticeships.

SWG Consulting was commissioned by HES to carry out research into a **decentralised hub-and-spoke training model**, to support the sector and consider the potential role of Lock 16.

Support sustainable organisations

The Museums Futures Programme delivered by MGS secured £4 million (from Scottish Government and NLHF) to provide **wrap-around organisational support**, including: financial sustainability and income diversification, organisational planning and governance, leadership development, workforce, volunteering and peer learning support.

The [Make Your Mark](#) volunteering campaign is being expanded, with successful funding applications submitted to HES and NLHF. A key strand focuses on **volunteering and employability**, strengthening routes from volunteering into employment and directly supporting SIP outcomes.

In summary

Across Year 2, Priority 1 activity has focused on: establishing a robust evidence base; aligning and expanding CPD and qualifications where gaps exist; investing in training infrastructure and delivery capacity; supporting organisational resilience and sustainability as a foundation for skills growth. This work collectively lays the groundwork for scaling provision, reducing skills at risk, and strengthening long-term sector resilience.

Priority 2

Attracting future talent and improving access

Overall focus: creating inclusive pathways in key areas and promoting heritage careers. There are three actions that sit under this priority:

1. Promote the sector as an attractive place to work.
2. Create recognised pathways into and across the sector for all.
3. Create employability opportunities.

See the key activity and progress in each of these five actions over the past year, below.

Promote the sector as an attractive place to work

Over 7000 people have engaged with careers programmes in year 2 which is 163% increase on year 1. **Build Your Future construction carers education programme** has continued to scale significantly, engaging 3334 learners from 19 schools through construction craftskills taster sessions. [Heritage Careers Week 2025](#) delivered 16 events across 10 areas, involving 15 partner organisations. A minimum of 2,600 people engaged with Heritage Careers Week, either through activities or with our [online resources](#), showing an increase of 51% from last year.

A **National 5 Creative Industries award in stone carving and roofing** was piloted by the [Scottish Traditional Building Forum](#) in partnership with City of Edinburgh Council, Compass Roofing and HES. The delivery has grown beyond Edinburgh this year to include schools in Stirling and will expand to Prestwick in 2026/7.

Careers resources and case studies were also developed. A [career profiles pack](#) was created for educators, supported by video reels, to demonstrate progression routes and role diversity within the sector. These resources complement wider schools and youth engagement programmes.

Create recognised pathways into and across the sector for all

The sector has been developing early and pre-apprenticeship pathways. HES in partnership with the University of Nottingham and the University of Cambridge published a **report on improving access to careers** in Scotland's heritage sector. The project identified the primary obstacles to workforce entry and progression: the underrepresentation of ethnic minority individuals and disabled individuals in leadership positions; biased and exclusionary recruitment practices; financial barriers; lack of support for disabled employees; and geographic disparities.



Image: An HES Ranger shows a visitor Holyrood Park in Edinburgh.

Craft Your Career completed **six pilot rounds of pre apprenticeships** with 48 learners, testing two delivery models (independent provider and college/local authority). 89% achieved the NPA Construction Craft Technician (SCQF Level 4) and 75% progressed into positive destinations within six months. NTS are developing **Foundation Apprenticeships** integrated into two significant projects, Mackintosh Illuminated (Argyll & Bute/Glasgow) and Fyvie Reimagined (Aberdeenshire).

Work has been ongoing to **develop and align skills pathways**. A construction skills pathway is being developed for traditional building skills, linking school engagement, National 5 awards, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships and craft fellowships. New pathways are progressing in archaeology, supported by qualification and apprenticeship development, and discussions are underway with [Lantra](#) to develop a foundation apprenticeship supporting roles in historic landscapes and gardens.

MGS are in their third year of their **Delivering Change initiative**. A collective effort between MGS and partnering museums, galleries, and community groups, this programme aims to help them restructure as organisations based on anti-oppressive principles. In 2025-26, 29 separate events and training courses have been delivered, spanning a range of topics to delegates and organisations across the country. Over 100 organisations and groups have now signed up to Delivering Change.

Create employability opportunities for those furthest from the workforce

People continue to enter the sector via the £5.2 million [Vinehill Trust](#) funded to **Craft Your Career programme** which will create a national programme of pathways into traditional construction careers. The five-year programme includes pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships and craft fellowships. It will provide 100 learning opportunities across Scotland and aims to grow employer capacity to deliver fair and meaningful vocational routes.

In summary

Across Year 2, Priority 2 has focused on: scaling careers engagement across schools, young people, career changers and educators; increasing visibility of roles, pathways and progression routes through events, digital platforms and resources; creating clearer, more inclusive entry routes, particularly through pre-apprenticeships and foundation/apprenticeship pathways; and targeting those furthest from the workforce, using funded, structured employability programmes aligned to SIP outcomes.

Together, this activity strengthens the talent pipeline, improves access and diversity, and supports long-term workforce sustainability across the sector.

Priority 3

Fostering innovation

Overall focus: Supporting digital literacy and innovation and the use of modern technologies, and addressing climate-related challenges through new approaches. There are three actions that sit under this priority.

1. Building skills to support net zero mitigation, adaption and sustainability.
2. Fostering digital literacy and innovation.
3. Creating skills outputs from research outcomes.

See the key activity and progress in each of these five actions over the past year, below.

Building skills to support net zero, mitigation, adaptation and sustainability

Mapping and evidence building is ongoing. Organisational net-zero literacy levels are captured through the employer survey providing evidence for planning and monitoring of progress. HES have also commissioned research into the mapping of green skills training provision to identify gaps, inform future investment and the future development of an organisational self-reflection tool development (to be completed in August 2026).

After an unsuccessful bid to the Digital Accelerator Programme to develop an organisational self-reflection tool that would use organisational self-assessment data and signpost to relevant net-zero training, further development is planned in 2026.

Several **upskilling** initiatives have developed over the past year. The National Open College Network (NOCN)-accredited [Level 3 Award in Energy Efficiency Measures in Older and Traditional Buildings](#) has been delivered by HES to three cohorts and 42 learners in total, and they are exploring how they can support delivery of the award by other training providers.

MGS has delivered their [Climate and Nature Planning](#) course to 34 separate organisations and have also hosted [Climate Knowledge Exchanges](#) throughout the year to over 100 delegates.

Support for smaller organisations continues from funded programmes led by partners such as Keep Scotland Beautiful to improve climate and carbon literacy among community and smaller organisations through mentoring and supported learning models.



Fostering digital literacy and digital innovation

Gathering baseline data and drawing crucial insights have included incorporating digital maturity levels into the biannual employer survey to build a sector-wide dataset on digital capability. Digital literacy data are presented via Power BI dashboards to inform planning and prioritisation.

In terms of **skills sharing and collaboration**, planning is underway for a digital innovation event positioned as a platform for cross-sector knowledge exchange, collaboration, and peer learning.

The National Trust for Scotland funded a **Digital Documentation trainee** in partnership with HES, allowing both organisations to foster innovation and build digital literacy.

Creating skills outputs from research outcomes

The sector continues to build connections between researchers and training providers. Initial planning for a cross-sector knowledge exchange forum to prioritise and amplify research with transformational skills impact, has been paused temporarily due to capacity constraints but recognised as a key future opportunity.

In summary

Work is ongoing to build skills for net zero and sustainability through data collection, research, and training. Surveys and commissioned research are helping identify skills gaps and inform future investment, including plans for a self-assessment tool. Although initial funding for this tool was unsuccessful, development will continue.

Training activity has increased, including new retrofit and energy efficiency courses, climate planning programmes, and support for smaller organisations to improve climate literacy. Efforts are also underway to strengthen digital skills across the sector through data gathering and knowledge sharing events.

Finally, the sector is working to better connect research with skills development, though plans for a knowledge exchange forum have been delayed due to capacity constraints.

Our Pillars

Organisations throughout the heritage sector have been delivering activity in each of the SIP's pillars. Discover the activity the sector had taken over this past year to meet out three priorities: building capacity and growing provision; attracting future talent and improving access; and fostering innovation.



Archaeology activity during Heritage Careers Week. Courtesy of Archaeology Scotland

NTS/HES Digital Documentation Trainee at Kellie Castle, Fife. Courtesy of NTS.



Archaeology

Workforce outlook

The SIP consultation in 2023 emphasised the need for collaboration, advocacy, and a model of sustainable skills provision. Advocacy is needed to drive demand for relevant skills. A sustainable model should include cross-sector skills collaboration, succession planning, and addressing identified skills challenges. Required key skills identified include digital skills, public engagement, specialist technical skills, and knowledge and understanding of the construction sector and planning system. The theme of future skills was also identified – for example the need to develop skills and knowledge to support the delivery of the net zero agenda.

Careers in archaeology face issues with narrow entry routes and inequitable and unsustainable career pathways. The predominant entry route is through university, but there is a need for better integration between academia and industry. Despite a slight increase in the 2024/25 academic year, higher education statistics show an overall decrease in archaeology students in Scotland since 2015/16. Challenges include finding training providers and experienced trainers, and a lack of formal mechanisms to enable partnership working between universities and industry.

Year 2 has seen progress in all five priority areas (listed below), including the provision of CPD opportunities, new web resources and progression with new qualification development. The Archaeology Modern Apprenticeship development has continued with a new ‘Technical Expert Group’ convened and who meet regularly to co-design this new entry-route into the sector.

Sector capacity and resource remain the key constraints to making progress. Year 3 will focus on solidifying sub-sector partnerships to enhance outcomes with existing training and skill development initiatives.

Priorities and actions

Address the lack of post-excavation specialists.



Progress: Day seminar on the AHRC funded AEONS project (focused on environmental archaeology and delivered by UHI and HES) held in October to explore the scope of the project, training opportunities and stakeholder engagement.



The year ahead: Workshop in October focused on training and guidance. New Modern Apprenticeship to include a post-excavation pathway.

Upskilling in digital methods, including AI.



Progress: Day seminar on ‘AI and Cultural Heritage: Critical Reflections and Future Pathways’ took place in October 2025 as part of the [Chartered Institute for Archaeologists \(CIfA\)](#) Innovation Festival.

CPD workshop on OASIS V (the online system for reporting historic environment investigations) delivered in March 2026.

Developing skills and knowledge around Net Zero.



Progress: CPD workshop on Biodiversity Net Gain hosted by the CIfA Landscape Special Interest Group in September 2025.



The year ahead: ‘Sustainability’ to be embedded within the new Modern Apprenticeship for Archaeology

Continue to develop and build infrastructure to support training provision including a system to support specialists.



Progress: Early development of a funded project to develop an online training platform for archaeologists.

A business case for a review of selected National Occupational Standards (for Archaeology Practice) has been produced.



The year ahead: The business case will be submitted in April 2026, with the review scheduled to start in Summer 2026, subject to approval.

Develop sustainable and equitable career entry routes and pathways.



Progress: Continued development of a Modern Apprenticeship for Archaeology.

Continued development and promotion of new and existing vocational qualifications (e.g. the existing NVQ and the emerging PDA).

Ongoing engagement with student and early career archaeologists and attendance at career fairs and university-based conferences.



The year ahead: CIfA to provide sub-sector support for traineeship development.

Spotlight stories: Embedding vocational qualifications in archaeology traineeships

While traineeships exist in archaeology, the lack of a standardised programme means there is a varying quality of training. This can lead to trainees undertaking significant training activities, only for these achievements and skill acquisition to be unrecognised at their next career point.

In 2025, a collaboration between the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) designed an 18-month traineeship which embedded a vocational qualification. NTS was keen to create an opportunity to support an early career archaeologist to develop understanding of how core archaeological skills can be applied to integrated land management, onsite interpretation and public outreach. This traineeship was designed to enable someone to gain practical experience by working with industry experts and gaining an NVQ.

By incorporating this qualification, it has enabled the trainee to record and reflect on key activities completed during the traineeship, while achieving a formal qualification that will aid future job prospects. The trainee highlights that “Working with the Trust and doing the NVQ with CIfA has given me a sense of direction. It has been a great way to figure out what I enjoy and think about where I want to go next.”

The National Trust for Scotland and CIfA will continue to collaborate on future traineeship opportunities and hope to support other areas of the sector to design similar training programmes.





Architecture, engineering, planning, surveying in a heritage context and with a conservation approach

Workforce outlook

Scotland's built environment faces a tightening workforce landscape over the next decade, driven by an ageing skills base, declining training capacity and rising demand from housing quality, safety, and net zero requirements. With 1.1 million homes — including 340,000 traditional pre-1919 buildings — now at risk due to disrepair, the need for specialist craft, construction, retrofit and conservation skills will intensify. However, current pathways are fragmented, critical courses are disappearing, and employers report increasing difficulty recruiting roles across the sector, including planners, surveyors and conservation accredited specialists. Without intervention, shortages will deepen as experienced practitioners retire faster than new entrants can be trained, constraining Scotland's ability to meet climate, wellbeing and place-based regeneration targets. The workforce outlook therefore signals a decisive need for a coordinated skills system, improved pathways into quality jobs, and targeted investment that stabilises the pipeline, reverses the decline in specialist skills, and builds long-term sector resilience.

Priorities and actions

Build conservation awareness in various audiences (including local authorities and higher and further education).



Progress: An intern was recruited to carry out research into the level of conservation-based curricula within further and higher education courses.



The year ahead: Map level of conservation awareness across educational institutions onto a dashboard to monitor and report.

Develop strategy of engagement which establishes best practice and can inform programmes lacking in conservation content.

Use the findings from this research to start conversations with institutions.

Foster better collaboration between institutions.



Progress: The ‘Building connections: Shaping the future of construction’ event took place in October 2025.



The year ahead: A joint collective statement published by the AEPS delivery group on the [Built Environment Forum Scotland](#) website.

A joint CPD workshop was held in April to identify opportunities to align and collaborate around CPD.

Develop a collective approach to address skills, knowledge and training gaps in local authorities.



Progress: HES is developing an online training programme for planners with the support of sector partners. Module 1 is complete.



The year ahead: Development and roll out of further modules.

Engaging with schools and young people.



Progress: Participated in Heritage Careers Week, the national themed week that takes place in October every year to introduce people to the range of careers in the heritage sector.



The year ahead: Continue to raise the profile of careers through initiatives like Heritage Careers Week.

Spotlight stories: Building Connections event and collective statement

In October, representatives from across Scotland’s built environment came together at the BE-ST FEST fringe event Building Connections: Shaping the Future of Construction to explore how better collaboration could strengthen the sector’s resilience. The discussion revealed a skills system that is overly complex, slow to adapt and poorly aligned with employer needs, but also opportunities for collaboration to move the sector forward in collectively addressing shared challenges.

Following the event, as a key agreed outcome, the AEPS group published a collective statement which sets out the consensus view, outlining the actions the group and their partners are committed to delivering, and the asks of others, towards a joined-up approach to shared issues. A CPD strategy is being developed for those working across the trades and professions that deliver CPD to identify opportunities to align and collaborate on provision.



Archives and libraries

Workforce outlook

Building capability in advocacy, digital literacy, and innovation is a strategic priority for this part of the sector. Targeted engagement with schools, influencers, and community organisations is essential to strengthen career awareness in information management and to address persistent workforce diversity challenges. Current entry routes into the archives and libraries professions are highly constrained, and expanding vocational pathways—including apprenticeships and structured graduate roles—should be a priority. This will require more effective and sustained collaboration between education providers and employers to create coherent, accessible pipelines into the sector.

The sector benefits from an established ecosystem of competency frameworks, professional registration routes, and continuing professional development (CPD). However, greater strategic alignment across existing provision is needed to maximise impact and reduce fragmentation. There is also a clear opportunity to develop more structured informal learning and peer-based development models to support succession planning, leadership development, and the systematic sharing of knowledge and expertise.

Priorities and actions

Advocacy



Progress: Advocacy online CPD programme took place in Jan and Feb 2026
Four sessions 15 speakers and 304 in attendance.



The year ahead: Evergreen resources from the [online advocacy CPD programme](#) are held on the website of Scottish Council for Archives (SCA).

Increase opportunities for informal training.



Progress: In the past year the [Chartered Institute of Libraries and Information Professionals' \(CILIP\)](#) range of informal online training received 1000 bookings.

The [Archives and Records Association \(ARA\)](#) ran their Central Training Programme helping to build confidence and competence in core, essential skills in the archives and libraries sector. Across the UK and Ireland, 585 people have benefitted from this training.

Increase opportunities for collaboration.



Progress: The [Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland \(CILIPS\)](#) and SCA collaborated to deliver sector specific Carbon Literacy training.

ARA Scotland and SCA collaborated on a 'Scottish Archives Day' event celebrating the SCA's 'Your Scottish Archives' which was well attended.

Eight organisation worked together to create the advocacy online CPD programmes that ran throughout January and February 2026



The year ahead: Explore future opportunities for collaboration within the libraries and archives skills group that was set up to deliver the advocacy sessions.

Developing mechanisms for succession planning.



Progress: CILIPS have reopened their emerging leadership career mentorship programme, supporting 20 professionals in the libraries and archives sector.

Developing progressive pathways.



The year ahead: The focus for this year of the libraries and archives partnership that delivered the advocacy sessions is sustainability.

Spotlight stories: Advocacy sessions

Developing advocacy skills was highlighted as the number one priority in the libraries and archives consultation to support the refresh of the Skills Investment Plan in 2024. A group of organisations including the Archives and Records Association, Chartered Institute for Libraries and Information Professionals Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Government, Scottish Council for Archives, [National Records of Scotland](#), [Digital Preservation Coalition](#), and the [Scottish Library and Information Council](#) came together to plan a series of four online CPD sessions that took place in January and February 2026.

324 people attended across the four sessions. There was a wide range of attendees, with most coming from: libraries and archives; universities and colleges; schools; and heritage organisations. 100% of attendees said the sessions met or exceeded their expectations. This group of organisations were brought together for the first time to focus on the archives and libraries priorities, and the advocacy sessions were the first focus of this collaboration.



Conservation of art and artefacts

Workforce outlook

The conservation profession in Scotland relies on a modest pool of skilled practitioners who bring together advanced technical expertise, materials science knowledge, and a deep understanding of the principles and ethical frameworks that guide conservation practice. Growing the number of fully accredited conservator-restorers in Scotland is essential to ensuring the effective protection and preservation of the nation's unique cultural heritage.

A collaborative approach to succession planning, including skills sharing, mentoring, and peer learning, is needed. Apprenticeship models work well but there is not a framework in Scotland and capacity issues in organisations create barriers to take up. There is a need for more progressive levels of CPD and more practical skills development and accredited learning, including for non-conservators who care for collections.

Priorities and actions

Create a strategic approach to building competency



Progress: Consultation on and planned development of a conservation principles accredited vocational qualification based on Icon principles.

Through targeted outreach, there are now 20 professional conservators working their way through the process, which if accredited would represent 24% increase in the accredited workforce. This growth is further supported by the Mel Houston Accreditation Grant, established in memory of the late Mel Houston which has provided grants of up to 50% of accreditation costs to professionals based in Scotland.



The year ahead: Partners will continue to develop the qualification and associated processes.

Delivery of accreditation workshops to increase uptake of accreditation and promote the Mel Houston Grant.

Develop a structure for progressive CPD and practical application of training.



Progress: The progress made to create a strategic approach to building competency (as described above) also supported the progression of this priority.



The year ahead: The future activity planned for creating a strategic approach to building competency (as described above) will also support the progression of this priority.

Understand the role of accreditation and standards.



Progress: The progress made to create a strategic approach to building competency (as described above) also supported the progression of this priority.



The year ahead: The future activity planned for creating a strategic approach to building competency (as described above) will also support the progression of this priority.

Build capacity and skills to train others.



Progress: The progress made to create a strategic approach to building competency (as described above) also supported the progression of this priority.



The year ahead: The future activity planned for creating a strategic approach to building competency (as described above) will also support the progression of this priority.

Create a structure for knowledge sharing and succession planning.



Progress: Work on the skills at risk register will identify, assess, and advocate for skills at risk and provide collective evidence to support planning for succession planning. Icon has received funding from the Pilgrim Trust to recruit a researcher.



The year ahead: Pilot skills at risk methodology starting with textiles and industrial heritage and publish findings.

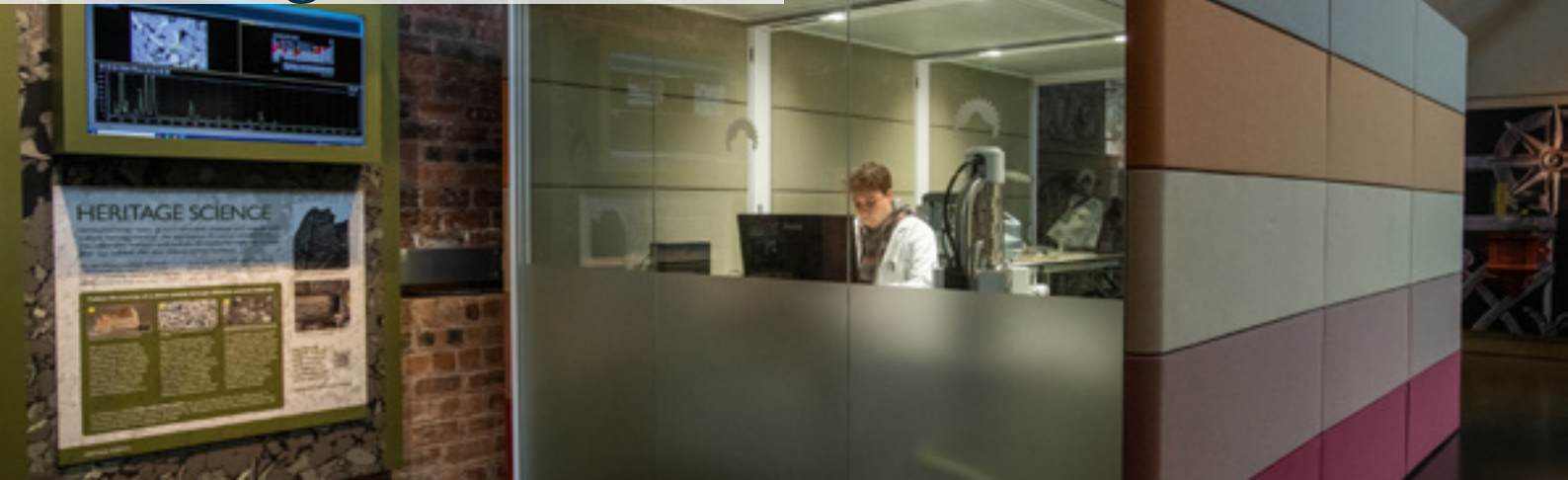
Spotlight stories: Heritage skills at risk list

Challenges within the education sector, alongside a rapidly diminishing number of professionals in several specialist areas, mean that many skills - often developed over years - now exist on a knife edge. To address these risks, Icon, HES and other partners have collaborated on the development of the Heritage Skills at Risk Framework, which will identify, classify, assess and highlight the specialist skills most at risk. This framework will support prioritisation, inform sector-wide workforce planning, and strengthen advocacy efforts. It will also create a basis for collaboration across stakeholders to ensure that effective strategies are put in place to safeguard vital technical skills and protect our shared heritage

The project has advanced significantly over the last year. Icon has secured the first tranche of funding from the Pilgrim Trust and begun the substantial research phase, which will encompass all 150 specialist areas of practice over an 18-month period. Current work is focused on drawing out the specific needs within Scotland and considering the range of interventions required to help stem the ongoing loss of heritage skills. In a parallel piece of work HES will be applying the Framework to skills in the traditional buildings pillar of the SIP with the ambition that this framework will eventually identify, classify, assess and highlight heritage skills across the SIP footprint.



Heritage science



Workforce outlook

Heritage science is an interdisciplinary field, bringing together practitioners from the humanities, sciences, and engineering. This diversity is one of its strengths, but it also makes it challenging to build a clear picture of the sector's skills landscape.

In its strategic framework, the [National Heritage Science Forum \(NHSF\)](#) highlighted several skills related challenges facing the sector, particularly the lack of robust understanding around workforce demographics, capacity, and skills needs. These gaps will impact the sector's ability to grow and sustain its workforce.

Over the past year, work in heritage science has focused on the exploration of alternative training models for the teaching and development of specialist skills and labour market intelligence (LMI).

Priorities and actions

Succession planning and knowledge sharing.



Progress: Completion of a successful pilot by HES of two Archaeological Science Fellowships.



The year ahead: Impact report for the Fellowships model and explore the potential to extend to other heritage science disciplines.

Developing structured skills provision.



Progress: Icon has been successful in receiving funding from AHRC to gather labour market information around the heritage science workforce. This will provide data to quantify the scale and nature of the skills challenge across the sector and highlight where the most significant gaps may lie. This work is being carried out in consultation with the NHSF.



The year ahead: Completion of LMI research overseen by the national heritage science forum skills and workforce group which includes SIP representation.

Attracting future talent and career pathways.



Progress: Heritage science roles have been embedded into events and careers resources for Heritage Careers Week and Build Your Future taster sessions.

HES Archaeological Science Fellowships continue to bridge the gap between the academic knowledge gained at university and the practical skills needed to work effectively in a scientific environment. This year they have undertaken placements in external laboratories including [National Museums Scotland](#), [AOC Archaeology](#), and the [Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre \(SUERC\)](#) radiocarbon laboratory.



The year ahead: Continue to develop the presence of heritage science roles in Heritage Careers Week.

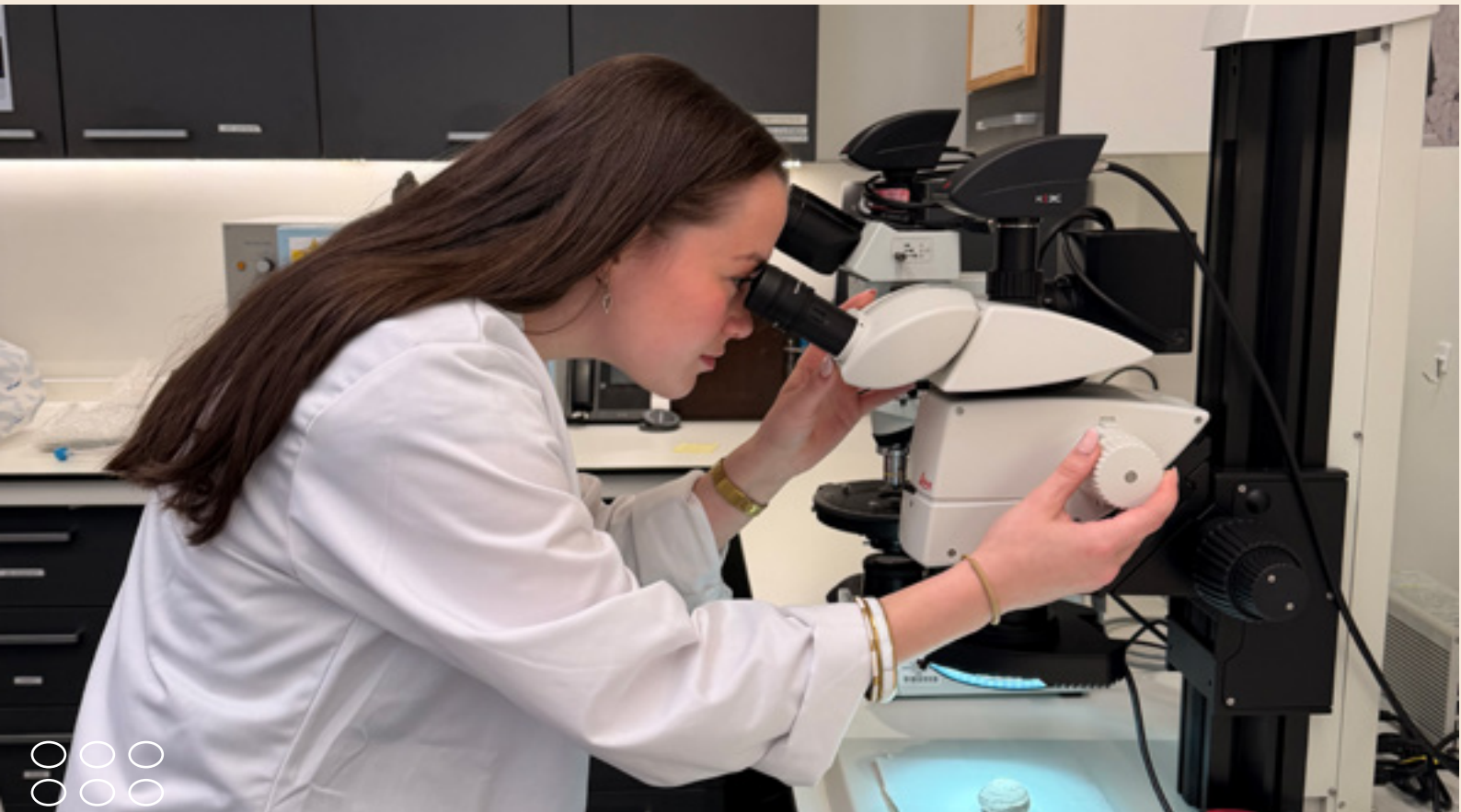
Continue to delivery and develop traineeship opportunities including the modern apprenticeship in heritage science, and archaeological science craft fellows.

Spotlight stories: Heritage Science Modern Apprenticeship

In 2025, HES welcomed a new Heritage Science Modern Apprentice, whose training focused on developing the skills and experience needed to work effectively as a laboratory technician. In the first year, the apprentice completed a Geology module with the Open University while working alongside HES Conservation Scientists. This combination introduced them to essential laboratory and fieldwork skills — including microscopy and geological observation in the field — both of which underpin much of the work carried out by the Heritage Science Team.

Following this initial year, the apprentice will begin an SVQ in Laboratory and Associated Technical Activities (Industrial Science) at SCQF Level 7, to be completed over the subsequent three years. This qualification will provide hands on experience with heritage science techniques and equipment, covering everything from instrument operation and routine maintenance scheduling to data interpretation and laboratory coordination.

Alongside the SVQ, the apprentice will also complete an HNC qualification in Applied Sciences, further strengthening their scientific foundation and supporting their development as a skilled and versatile laboratory professional.



Heritage tourism



Workforce outlook

Scotland's tourism sector—including heritage attractions, museums, historic sites, cultural venues, and visitor experiences—faces a period of continued change shaped by demographic shifts, evolving visitor expectations, and a tightening labour market. Tourism businesses operate within a complex environment where workforce supply challenges are intensified by competition with other sectors, seasonal working patterns, and a reliance on service-oriented roles. Forecast data suggests that while visitor demand is expected to grow, workforce availability may not keep pace, particularly in customer facing roles where communication, service quality, and experience delivery are essential. Heritage tourism providers, who rely heavily on skilled, personable staff to interpret Scotland's cultural and natural assets, will be especially affected by any persistent gaps in labour supply.

At the same time, there are opportunities for strengthening the sector through targeted skills investment. Enhancing leadership, digital capability, and place-based storytelling will be increasingly important for heritage destinations looking to create high value, authentic visitor experiences. Workforce priorities also include expanding training pathways, improving progression routes, and strengthening collaboration between industry, education providers, and regional partners. As Scotland continues to position itself as a worldclass cultural destination, heritage tourism employers will need to focus on both attracting new talent and developing existing staff to meet rising expectations around quality, sustainability, and visitor engagement

The tourism pillar is the only pillar that doesn't have a defined delivery mechanism. However, many of the priorities and actions are being delivered in other pillars, particularly Museums and Galleries. This area is also represented on [Skills Development Scotland's](#) national tourism skills group.

Priorities and actions

Developing a commercial / entrepreneurial mindset.



Progress: Development and roll out of MGS Museums Futures and Leadership programmes.



The year ahead: MGS's Museums Futures programme will provide support and training opportunities in fundraising, governance and marketing.

Attracting future talent and improving access.



Progress: Tourism roles are embedded in Heritage Careers Week resources and events. They are also included in the MGS Workforce for the Future project.

MGS have been approved to deliver cultural venue operations modern apprentices.



The year ahead: Continue to showcase tourism roles in events and resources developed for Heritage Careers Week 2026.

MGS plan to increase the number of Modern Apprenticeships offered across all their frameworks in 2026/27.

Soft skills development: recruit on aptitude and train on skills.



Progress: A tourism and hospitality toolkit has been produced by the Skills Development Scotland's Tourism and Hospitality Skills Group in partnership with the [Serving the Future project](#).



The year ahead: Explore a pre-apprenticeship programme as part of a pathway approach.

Fostering digital literacy.



Progress: Cross sector digital innovation event was successfully delivered in June 2026.



The year ahead: Explore the development of an organisational self-reflection tool using digital maturity levels that is underpinned by training provision (2027 onwards).



Historic landscapes and gardens

Workforce outlook

The 2023 SIP consultation findings were sense checked at ‘Designing the future: the value of historic landscapes and gardens’, an event which took place in March 2026 at the [Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh](#). The findings from the event reiterated a requirement to build a more future-ready heritage landscapes and gardens workforce through stronger succession planning, ongoing upskilling, and better access to specialist knowledge.

There is a need to increase knowledge and skills around sustainability, plant selection, biodiversity monitoring, climate projections, and balancing cultural, ecological and climate-related considerations. Participants highlighted the need for improved digital capability as well as strengthened understanding of legislation, planning, consents and heritage significance assessment. Enhanced networking, mentoring, communities of practice, and CPD pathways are seen as essential to improving professional confidence and consistency. There is also a requirement for upskilling for key stakeholders to support more consistent, informed, effective and future ready decision making across organisations and regions.

Priorities and actions

Raising awareness of the landscape as part of the historic environment.



Progress: ‘Designing the future: the value of historic landscapes and gardens’ event took place in March 2026.



The year ahead: Consider the findings from the workshop and identify next steps.

Exploring the feasibility of developing a landscape conservation CPD programme based on event findings to support succession planning.

Skills to support nature-based solutions.



Progress: The ‘Designing the future’ event included nature based CPD tours of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh.



The year ahead: Nature Based solutions has been identified as a topic for future CPD opportunities.

Increasing conservation awareness.



Progress: The ‘Designing the future’ event brought together knowledge of conservation practices, and awareness of conservation projects in a variety of natural spaces in Scotland.

Attracting future talent and investing in young people.



Progress: Contributed to Careers Unpacked webpages and Heritage Careers Week.



The year ahead: Continue to embed landscape roles into heritage careers week events and resources.

Work with Lantra to make the historic environment roles more visible.

Defining progressive career pathways.



The year ahead: Work with Lantra to explore the potential of pre-apprenticeships.

Spotlight stories: Designing the future. The value of historic landscapes and designed gardens

A partnership of National Trust for Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, Lantra and the [Landscape Institute](#) collaborated on 'Designing the future: the value of historic landscapes and gardens (4 March 2026). Which brought ninety heritage, conservation, landscape, and environmental professionals to the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh to explore how Scotland's historic gardens and designed landscapes can shape climate-resilient, biodiverse futures.

The event highlighted the protection and significance of these landscapes, showcased practical tools and case studies on biodiversity and plant selection, and emphasised their role as living ecological infrastructure rather than static heritage assets. Discussions also focused on skills and resource needs for the sector, underscoring the importance of cross-sector collaboration in supporting nature recovery and sustainable landscape management.



Industrial heritage



Workforce outlook

Strengthening collaboration, improving data intelligence, and securing adequate resourcing are essential to sustaining the Industrial heritage skills pipeline. While the industrial heritage community in Scotland is already well networked, there is a need for more coordinated cross-sector partnership working—particularly with active industries that still hold living skills—to break down silos, share knowledge, and collectively address succession planning. Improved data and research were identified as vital for mapping where specialist skills currently reside, and for learning from international approaches to safeguarding industrial heritage expertise.

There is a requirement to build conservation awareness among specifiers, contractors, curators, and archivists, and acknowledged barriers to mainstreaming conservation within formal qualifications and apprenticeships due to demographic and geographic challenges. A more structured, well-resourced skills framework is needed to support practical skills development, strengthen standards, expand CPD, and ensure the long-term sustainability of mechanical, materials based, recordkeeping, safety, and management skills crucial to industrial heritage.

Priorities and actions

Scoping to assess what industrial skills provision is available in other countries.



Progress: A small group worked with the organisers of the [Big Stuff](#) conference in Ghent to develop a session which looked at the approach to skills provision in Scotland, Flanders, and Australia. The conference had two in person hubs in Perth Australia and Ghent Belgium, and an online option.

Pilot scheme which uses employability to develop skills at risk and builds in social impact analysis.



Progress: Qualifications development team has been established to develop a conservation principles qualification (links to conservation pillar) which when developed can be used to assess the competency of learners undertaking vocational learning programmes.



The year ahead: Draft qualification will go out for consultation in May 2026.

Explore the opportunities afforded by pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships and craft fellow programmes to develop industrial heritage skills.

Build capacity for delivery: Create a facilitator or co-ordinator role.



The year ahead: Seek opportunities for additional resources.

Build pool of mentors to support accredited learning.

Create a framework for succession planning (transferring skills).



The year ahead: Identifying skills related industrial intangible cultural heritage for inclusion in the living heritage inventory.

Industrial heritage is one of Icon's pilot areas for the skills at risk methodology which will provide data to support a framework.

Forge links with working industries that have a commercial need to nurture traditional skills.



The year ahead: Explore opportunities to work with working industries.

Develop a framework for focusing on CPD – materials and mechanical skills.



Progress: [Grampian Transport Museum](#) have been successful in securing £262,333 from funders to establish a heritage engineering training centre at the venue.

Sessions have been incorporated into the CPD programme.



The year ahead: Will continue to incorporate key areas into CPD programmes.

Spotlight stories: Building capacity and growing provision. Building a sustainable ecosystem for industrial heritage skills

The SIP Industrial Heritage Group has focused on two main areas in 2025/2026: qualification development and learning from others.

The group aims to develop an industry-relevant vocational award, endorsed by Icon, that equips learners with the skills and knowledge required to demonstrate competence in core conservation principles. Designed to be broad enough to apply across multiple conservation disciplines, the award will support apprentices undertaking mainstream frameworks by providing a means to evidence their understanding of conservation principles, as well as learners engaged in a wide range of vocational pathways that do not currently lead to accredited or certified qualifications.

International knowledge sharing and learning was facilitated by organising and delivering a joint Scotland/Flanders/Perth (Australia) session as part of Big Stuff, Ghent 2025. It provided a platform for discussing approaches to safeguarding industrial heritage skills, showcasing work in Scotland, and learning from the experiences of other countries.





Museums and galleries

Workforce outlook

The employers' survey consultation findings in 2023 identified the need for collaboration to support skills development and address diversity and accessibility challenges. A lack of capacity and resources to undertake training or support skills and knowledge sharing was identified as the main barrier to skills development, alongside a lack of provision, particularly for volunteers, and geographic gaps in provision.

There is a lack of structured, consistent, and quality-assured industry-standard training. The development of Modern Apprenticeships has helped increase diversity and accessibility, but there is still a need for anti-racism, decolonisation, and neurodivergent-friendly content in training provision. Three main skills areas were identified as either a need or a deficit: digital skills, skills to support environmental sustainability, and transferable skills. The sector must develop a collaborative strategic vision and a coordinated approach to ensure workforce resilience and investigate opportunities to collaborate with other sectors.

Priorities and actions

Identify a system for skills and knowledge sharing to address workforce issues including succession planning



Progress: The £4million MGS Museums Future programme, launched in July 2025 was designed and delivered to share best practice. A key focus is legacy and succession planning.



The year ahead: Successful delivery of Museums Futures and all its strands.

Digitisation of organisational health checker (OHC) to inform future programming and work on current priorities identified through the OHC of: fundraising and enterprise, communications and marketing, workforce and human resources.

Develop a more inclusive culture and address barriers that exclude



Progress: Delivering Change programme is working to address barriers of systemic exclusion and adopt an anti-racist and anti-ableist approach to create a more inclusive sector. So far this has included: 651 hours of anti-oppression training completed across the sector; 17 Museum Transformers organisations have completed anti-racism training; 114 people have completed their anti-ableism training; and 4 knowledge exchanges, sharing perspectives from a variety of anti-oppressive practices. Finally, 11 people with lived experience of systemic exclusion who work in the heritage sector are mentoring 11 Museum Transformer leaders, who are in turn supporting mentors to better understand the role and responsibilities of leadership positions to help equip them as future leaders



The year ahead: Delivering Change is into its final year and the focus is on completing the programme activities alongside evaluation, learning and planning for the programme legacy and next steps.

Create the environment for more cross-industry collaboration



Progress: Collaboration is a key strand in Scotland's Museums and Galleries strategy. Collaboration is embedded in MGS programmes.



The year ahead: Connect museums and galleries to culture sector and non-sector partners across areas including climate, skills development and health and wellbeing.

Create a strategic framework for training provision



Progress: The Museums Futures programme will incorporate a framework of strategic training provision and a reliable bank of external, approved subject specialist experts and consultants that will be available to the sector.



The year ahead: Implementation of MGS Consultants List.

Delivery of second iteration of Museum Futures Wraparound support programme.

Explore the opportunity for developing a framework of sustainable , cost effective training provision.

Spotlight stories: The Black Watch Castle and Museum

[The Black Watch Castle and Museum](#) trialled a Murder Mystery Dinner event this year. Chief Executive Officer of the Black Watch Regimental Trust said, “The aim was to generate valuable income for the Museum and to attract new audiences to engage with our Museum and charity.

‘We thought the setting of Balhousie Castle and the Museum would be the perfect setting for an event of this type. By coupling this experience with a dining offer would help generate good levels of additional income to build our commercial performance.

‘The event was a sell-out with the full capacity of 80 seats completely filled. Feedback from visitors was extremely positive...[and the] event generated valuable income for the Museum which helps build our sustainability.’

This spotlight highlights the importance of identifying, developing, and delivering additional income streams as a key component of organisational sustainability and resilience. In an increasingly challenging funding environment, the ability to diversify income sources is essential for organisations seeking to maintain and expand their services, reduce reliance on traditional funding mechanisms, and invest in future growth. By encouraging organisations to think creatively about the services, products, partnerships, and opportunities they can offer, the programme supports a culture of continuous improvement, entrepreneurial thinking, and long-term sustainability. Developing new income-generating activities also encourages organisations to explore new ways of working, engage with different sectors, and respond proactively to changing audience needs and expectations.

Importantly, the process of developing and delivering new income-generating opportunities also creates valuable learning and development opportunities for staff and volunteers. As individuals become involved in areas such as business planning, marketing, partnership development, project management, and service delivery, they build new skills, knowledge, and confidence. This not only supports personal and professional development but also strengthens organisational capacity and resilience.

Ultimately, the development of additional income streams is about more than generating revenue. It is an opportunity to foster innovation, encourage enterprise, build workforce capability, increase organisational confidence, and create sustainable pathways for future growth.





Traditional building skills and materials

Workforce outlook

There is an urgent need to develop a more effective model to address challenges and advocate for the importance of traditional building skills. There are significant skills deficits in areas such as retrofit skills, stone masonry, lead work, lime plastering, roofing, sash window repairs, and traditional joinery. Building interdisciplinary awareness and conservation knowledge among stakeholders is crucial to develop the critical mass needed.

There are some positive initiatives that are being developed and could be upscaled but there are systematic failures in this area which if remain unaddressed will lead to a decline in the availability of these skills.

Priorities and actions

Explore a national hub / mobile facility model.



Progress: Lock 16, a partnership between [Scottish Canals](#) and HES has been successful in securing funding from The Falkirk Growth Deal and NLHF. This will see the transformation of the old Irn Bru factory into a training centre for canal, industrial heritage, and traditional building skills. Lock 16 will allow accredited provision to be expanded. SWG consultancy has been commissioned to do exploratory work around a 'hub and spoke' model for traditional skills to identify opportunities to support regional provision across Scotland.



The year ahead: Collaboration between HES, Scottish Canals and partners to develop the training centre and offer.

Consider the findings of hub and spoke research and feed into planning for Lock 16 where appropriate.

Reverse erosion of training provision and create the foundations for a positive future.



Progress: A Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities Intern has been recruited to carry out research into the level of conservation provision in FE and HE construction courses. This will help clarify our pipeline and identify opportunities for action. Report is due August 2026.

Build flexible delivery with alternative routes.



Progress: In December 2024 HES secured £5.2 million in funding from the Vinehill Trust over five years towards their Craft Your Career programme (HES's traditional skills training programme offering pre-apprenticeships, craft fellowships, traineeships and apprenticeships, via a Host Employer Model and as part of a school to specialism pathway approach). Since 2021, these training programmes have included 64 skills experience roles, either completed or in post at the time of writing this report.



The year ahead: Continued delivery of the Craft Your Career programme.

Seek opportunities to roll out elements outside the programme through partner engagement with local authorities and key stakeholders.

Attract future talent.



Progress: Build Your Future has offered 32 opportunities this year to 2723 young people in 22 schools in 8 local authority areas to learn about construction careers.

Twenty pupils in Edinburgh have taken part in a pilot which used the National 5 Award in Creative Industries to develop skills in stone carving and roofing.

Over 900 learners nationally have engaged with Scotland's dedicated building conservation centre the [Engine Shed](#), through its programmes, including professionals, further and higher education representatives, young people, and members of the public. This includes 600 participants in its hybrid events programme focused on building conservation knowledge, including materials, science and technology. A further 55 learners took part in the week-long Introduction to Building Conservation summer school, while 329 people attended Open Days featuring hands-on skills tasters in building skills, paper conservation, climate skills, and more.



The year ahead: The National 5 pilot will be expanded in Edinburgh and other areas in 2026/2027. Learning materials are being created to support teachers to deliver this qualification.

Deliver net zero.



Progress: The delivery of the Level 3 Award in Energy Efficiency Measures for Older and Traditional Buildings. Since the start of 2025, 49 learners have completed the course.

The year ahead: Deliver the Level 3 Award to three cohorts a year, each with 20 learners max.



To explore how HES can build capacity in the sector and with key stakeholders to deliver this qualification locally.

Fund training delivery and infrastructure.



Progress: HES has been meeting with skills agencies, the Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers to advocate for funding for historic environment skills.



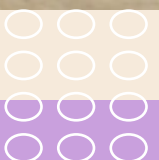
The year ahead: Continue conversations.

Spotlight stories: Lock 16

Scotland's Centre of Excellence for Canals and Traditional Skills, or 'Lock 16', is a major regeneration and skills development project located at the former AG Barr (Irn Bru) factory site beside the Forth and Clyde Canal in Camelon, Falkirk. Managed by a partnership of Scottish Canals and Historic Environment Scotland, it forms part of the Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal and aims to create a national hub for canal heritage, traditional skills training, community involvement and low carbon innovation.

The project will transform a long vacant industrial site in one of the most deprived areas of Scotland into a multimillion-pound low carbon skills and training campus to help address Scotland's shortage of traditional and heritage skills, support the conservation of historic structures such as canals, aqueducts, and buildings and provide new employment, volunteering, and learning opportunities. Lock 16 will have dedicated workshops, classrooms, and training spaces dedicated to the teaching of traditional skills such as stonemasonry, heritage engineering, and rural skills. A volunteer hub to involve local communities in maintaining the canal network, facilities for apprenticeships, school engagement, and upskilling programmes, including accredited and nonaccredited training.

Funded by £4 million from the Growth Deal and £3.7 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The centre will open autumn 2027.



Goals for Year 3



Wider geographical reach: We aim to widen the geographical spread of SIP delivery, especially in the area of careers-awareness activity. For example, we plan to deliver Heritage Careers Week events in at least one new location.



Focus on innovation and technology: We will deliver more dedicated activity, including events and research, on innovation and technology, with the focus on digital skills, climate skills, and energy and retrofit in the historic built environment.



Deeper understanding of work-based learning: By analysing completion rates and any gaps between this and enrolment figures, we would like to better understand how effective work-based learning is and start to quantify the actual impact it is having on the heritage sector.



Clarify our formal education pipeline: Through targeted research we will establish the level of conservation content in key areas including construction, tourism and land-based subjects and the opportunities for engagement.



Grow vocational opportunities: as part of a pathway approach to increase the number of opportunities available to those wanting to join and move within the sector.



Focus on green skills: especially skills to support net zero, mitigation, adaptation and sustainability by mapping provision, identifying gaps and making it easier to access.



Pilot Skills at Risk methodology.

Contact

For any queries about this report, or to get involved in the delivery of the Skills Investment Plan, or to discuss heritage skills activity, please contact skills@hes.scot.

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