

Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2023-25



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

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Foreword

As the newly appointed CEO of Historic Environment Scotland (HES), I am delighted to lead this organisation as we work toward creating a more inclusive and equitable historic environment. This report provides clear evidence of our ongoing efforts to listen, learn, and act on the barriers that many communities face in accessing and engaging with Scotland's rich heritage. Through honest reflection and collaboration, we are showing that we are not only trying but are committed to meaningful change.

Our Equality Outcomes 2025-29 are being co-created with the communities whose voices have guided us throughout this process. These groups have shared invaluable insights into what equity and inclusion look like in practice and how HES can better serve everyone. Their input has shaped our commitments to reduce barriers, foster belonging, and ensure that Scotland's historic environment is accessible and welcoming for all.

We know that achieving true inclusion takes time, but we are confident that we continue to move in the right direction. By embracing a process of listening, co-creating, and acting with purpose, we are ensuring that our outcomes are a roadmap for meaningful, lasting progress.

This work is possible thanks to the incredible contributions of our community groups, colleagues and partners. I want to thank everyone who has participated in this process, sharing their stories, creativity, and ideas to help us better understand the barriers people face and the opportunities to overcome them. Together, we are creating an inclusive vision for Scotland's heritage – one that celebrates and reflects the diversity of its people.

I am excited for what lies ahead and committed to ensuring that our historic environment is a space where everyone feels valued and connected.

Warm regards



**Katerina Brown, Chief Executive Officer,
Historic Environment Scotland**



Introduction

Historic Environment Scotland (HES), is the public body and charity dedicated to understanding, caring for and promoting Scotland's historic environment. Central to our work is a commitment to advancing equality, diversity, inclusion, and justice. To achieve this, we continue to take concrete steps to integrate these principles into everything we do, while addressing inequalities through targeted actions.

Through our corporate plan, **Heritage For All**, we envision a Scotland where the historic environment is cherished, understood, shared, and enjoyed by everyone. This plan emphasises the importance of collaboration, expanding participation, and reaffirms our steadfast dedication to advancing equality, diversity, inclusion, and justice in all areas of our work. As the organisation responsible for leading and coordinating delivery of **Our Past, Our Future** (2023), the strategy for Scotland's historic environment, we are committed to ensuring that the cultural, social, environmental, and economic value of our heritage makes a meaningful contribution to the wellbeing of the nation.

This report provides an overview of the progress we've made in advancing equality and human rights between April 2023 and March 2025. Since the publication of our **2021 Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report**, we have continued to make good strides towards our Equality Goals. In April 2023, we published an interim progress report covering the period from April 2021 to March 2023. This report outlines our achievements for the period April 2023 to March 2025 and includes our Employee Pay Data and Equality Monitoring Data. Looking forward, we have also published our Equality Outcomes 2025-29, demonstrating our continued commitment to advancing equality and inclusion.

We are dedicated to ensuring Scotland's historic environment is inclusive and accessible to all, in line with our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), as set out by the Equality Act 2010 and the Scottish-specific duties.



Family day out at Dumbarton Castle

About us

Our functions are set out in the Historic Environment (Scotland) Act 2014, and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

The historic environment is part of Scotland's story, and that story is never finished. So, at HES we're always working to ensure that our rich heritage is conserved and passed on to future generations and seeking ways to help everyone celebrate and share the heritage that matters to them.

The work we do is as rich and varied as Scotland's history itself. We:

- act as a regulator through designations and consents, enabling change to Scotland's historic environment while protecting the things we value most about it
- look after and promote access to over 300 sites of national importance, and 45,000 collections of objects associated with them
- maintain Scotland's national record of the historic environment, a unique resource for study and decision-making
- enable others to care for their historic environment, by developing and promoting the knowledge, skills, policies, advice, and materials needed to care for Scotland's historic environment
- award millions of pounds of grant funding each year to local communities to repair, revitalise and reuse their historic environment
- investigate, research, and innovate around Scotland's historic environment, to understand and share what's valuable about it and how it can be protected



Visitors at Elgin Cathedral

Delivery

The delivery of our Equality Outcomes is guided by the structured implementation and ongoing monitoring within our Equality Action Plan.

Updated annually and overseen by our Equalities Manager, the plan is supported by the Equality Champions Group, which meets quarterly. This group, comprising senior representatives from across our Directorates and functions, provides regular updates on actions relevant to their areas and identifies new projects and initiatives that align with our Equality Goals. The Equality Action Plan is a living document that guides our efforts across the organisation. By drawing on a comprehensive array of reporting information we ensure that our equality and inclusion initiatives are deeply embedded into all facets of our operations.

Our commitment to embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion is further strengthened by several colleague forums and networks. We currently have seven such groups: the LGBT+ Network, Women's Equity Network, Youth Forum, Thinking Differently (the Neurodiversity Forum), the Global Diversity Network, Disability Forum, and the Wellbeing Forum. These forums and networks not only promote a sense of belonging among our colleagues but also offer safe spaces for candid discussions about their work-life experiences. Their contributions are essential to our goal of cultivating a culture of inclusivity, ensuring that our services are accessible, responsive, and appropriate for everyone, regardless of their characteristics.



LGBT+ Networks meet up at Edinburgh Castle

Governance and Reporting

The governance of our equality initiatives is overseen by our People Committee, a sub-committee of the HES Board. This committee is entrusted with the responsibility of supervising our approach to equalities and monitoring our progress in meeting equality duties and providing assurance to the HES Board. The committee meets quarterly and is chaired by a Board member, with participation from two other Board members, and the Director of People.

The Director of External Relations and Partnerships oversees the production of our mainstreaming report and monitors the delivery of equality initiatives. Additionally, the Directors of People, Heritage, and Marketing and Engagement serve as Equality Champions,

ensuring a unified approach to promoting equality across the organisation. However, the responsibility for promoting and embedding equality across our operations is shared by the entire Executive Leadership Team. This collective responsibility ensures that our commitment to equality is deeply integrated into all aspects of our work.

Our Corporate Plan reflects this commitment through a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) related to equalities, demonstrating our dedication to promoting equality. The Executive Leadership Team regularly reviews performance against these KPIs, and the Chief Executive consistently reports on corporate performance to the HES Board. This structured approach to governance ensures that our equality objectives are met and that they remain a central focus of our organisational strategy.



Where Are You From: Tales of Migration and Identity – The Engine Shed

Legal Framework

The legal basis for HES's equality initiatives is rooted in the Equality Act 2010, which places a general equality duty on public bodies. This duty requires us to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity by addressing disadvantages, meeting specific needs, and encouraging participation in public life
- foster good relations between people with and without protected characteristics

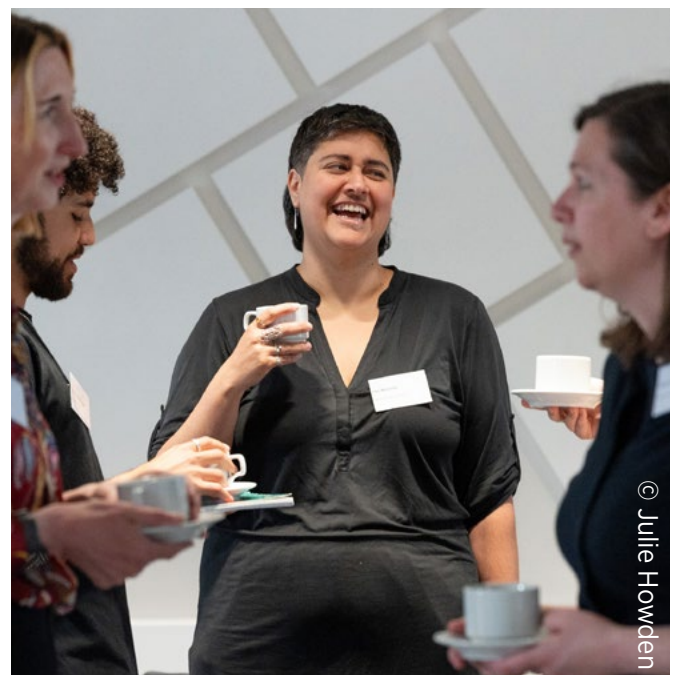
The Act identifies nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. It also defines direct and indirect discrimination, including the importance of understanding intersectionality, where multiple characteristics affect people's experiences.

HES is further governed by the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012, which require our Equality Outcomes to be evidence-based and involve input from relevant groups. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) monitors our performance in meeting these duties.

Through this comprehensive approach, we not only meet our legal obligations but also strive to create an inclusive and equitable environment for all.

In fulfilling our public sector equality duties, we are publishing three reports:

- **Equality Progress Report (2023-25):** This outlines the progress we have made in embedding equality into our functions since our establishment – it follows our previous **2021-2023 report**, published in April 2023.
- **Equality Outcomes and Action Plan (2025-29):** This sets out our priorities and commitments for advancing equality over the next four years.
- **Employee Pay Data and Equality Monitoring Data:** This provides an overview of pay equality and workforce diversity within our organisation.



Colleagues at the Improving Access Symposium

Part 1

Mainstreaming equality in HES 2023-25

Measuring our Equality Action Plan 2023-25

In April 2021 we published 2021-25 Equalities Outcomes and Annual Action Plan for the period from 2021 to 2025. We set out three outcomes:

Our Society – We make a real difference in people's lives



Director lead:
Alison Turnbull

Our Services – We deliver responsive services to meet the needs and expectations of diverse groups



Director leads:
Elizabeth McCrone
& Stephen Duncan

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Our People – We attract, recruit, and develop a diverse Board, workforce, and volunteer base



Director lead:
Lindsey Ross

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In March 2023, we published our bi-annual **Progress Report**, including Employee Pay Data and Equality Monitoring Data for April 2021 to March 2023, demonstrating the progress made towards our Equality Outcomes.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are core to our vision and central to our goal of being a leading public service provider and employer. This report outlines the progress we've made over the last two years (April 2023 to March 2024) in achieving our Equality Outcomes and presents pay and equality monitoring data.



Audience members at 'Where Are You From: Tales of Migration and Identity' held at The Engine Shed

Outcome 1: Our Society – We make a real difference in people’s lives.

Over the past two years, we have made significant strides in enhancing the historic environment’s benefits for all. This section will demonstrate how our strategic initiatives and commitment are making a difference and creating a positive impact on our communities and people.



© Andrew Godfrey

The BIG Kelso
Abbey LEGO Build

Here is an overview of our accomplishments from the past two years, featuring highlights of notable projects.

Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) – the strategy for Scotland's historic environment was launched on 28 June 2023. This mission-driven strategy focuses on sustaining and enhancing the historic environment's benefits for all, with a strong emphasis on inclusion. Developed through extensive consultation with over 800 participants and 200 organisations, OPOF targets three key areas for collective action: achieving net zero, empowering resilient and inclusive communities, and building a wellbeing economy. These priorities are vital to optimising the historic environment's impact on the people of Scotland over the next five years.

We have developed our **BSL Plan** for 2024-30 through a comprehensive process involving both internal and external consultations. Our BSL Working Group collaborated closely with stakeholders who will be impacted by this plan to ensure it addresses everyone's needs and secures broad ownership for effective implementation. We are grateful to Deaf Action for their invaluable contributions and to the Deaf Youth Group, who provided critical insights that helped shape the plan. Our commitment includes regular awareness

sessions on Hard of Hearing and British Sign Language learning sessions for HES colleagues, producing BSL videos for most external publications, and providing BSL interpreters at our events and meetings and continuing BSL tours at Edinburgh and Stirling castles.

Community Connections has been successful as an HES-wide initiative to enhance collaboration with local communities, the heritage sector, and other fields like tourism, health, and the environment. This programme showcases how Scotland's heritage supports and enriches communities by focusing on listening to partners, providing accessible expertise, concentrating resources, and encouraging open collaboration. Activities included online events, community-led projects, knowledge-sharing, and creative engagement. The projects addressed key themes, such as health and wellbeing, skills and volunteering, creativity, climate change, and community regeneration.

Due to the intrinsic relationship between the heritage sector, volunteering, and communities, HES supports volunteer development through various initiatives. Our national volunteering



Launch of Our Past, Our Future



HES Corporate Plan Launch with BSL interpreter

programme prioritises health, safety, and wellbeing. We have established a national HES Volunteering Network to foster collaboration and enhance the volunteer experience. We work with Volunteer Scotland as a key partner for volunteer development and have staff representation on the Scottish Government Volunteering for All Framework Action Plan Groups, representing HES and the **Make Your Mark Campaign**. As a key partner in Make Your Mark, we aim to increase the number and diversity of heritage volunteers in Scotland, focusing on underrepresented groups. Over 100 heritage organisations have joined the campaign, which has shared over 150 inclusive volunteering resources, launched a sector-wide recruitment campaign, and provided peer support through the Volunteer Organisers Network. Additionally, we have hosted knowledge-sharing events and annual mini-conferences on topics such as green volunteering and removing barriers to heritage volunteering.

The first hybrid Make Your Mark Volunteer Managers Conference, 'Inclusion at Every Stage', took place at the Engine Shed on 29 February 2024. This event brought volunteer managers from across the country together to hear from various speakers. The speakers

shared best practices in inclusive volunteering and powerful, thought-provoking stories of their own lived experiences. Speakers and workshop facilitators included Glasgow Disability Alliance, and Jambo Radio, AMINA Muslim Women's Resource Centre and the Scottish Refugee Council, with the opening remarks provided by Kaukab Stewart, then Minister for Culture, Europe, and International Development.

Prior to March 2020, we managed a variety of volunteer roles, including Tour Guides, Activity Volunteers, and Meet & Greet Volunteers. The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted these programmes, but it also allowed us to reassess and improve volunteer experiences. Post-pandemic, we introduced the flexible Visitor Connector role, merging several roles to enhance visitor engagement. This role, launched at Craigmillar Castle in summer 2023, successfully welcomed 11 new volunteers. Visitor Connectors help deliver tours, lead activities, and engage with visitors, ensuring a valuable and enjoyable experience.

"Volunteering has been an incredibly rewarding experience. It opens a window for me."

HES volunteer



Make Your Mark Volunteer Managers' Conference 2024



Edinburgh's Muslim Scouts visit Stirling Castle

In 2019, we launched the **Skills Investment Plan (SIP)** for the historic environment in collaboration with Skills Development Scotland. Following sector consultation, the SIP was reviewed and refreshed in 2024 to address key skills challenges and opportunities within the sector. As part of the SIP's focus on attracting future talent and improving access, we have worked with cross-sector delivery groups on initiatives to tackle workforce issues. Two key initiatives are the **Improving Access** project and the development of a national **Careers Week**. The Improving Access project aims to understand and address the cultures, processes, and structures that prevent diverse groups from joining the sector's workforce in Scotland. To support this, we commissioned community partners and equalities consultants to engage with 55 individuals from a range of backgrounds through 10 exploratory and co-design workshops. The project culminated in a symposium, where sector stakeholders discussed key learnings, shared best practices, and fostered conversations around inclusion. Our Heritage Careers Week, developed in partnership with Developing the Young Workforce, aims to raise awareness of careers in the heritage sector. Between 2022 and 2023, a total of 3,376 young people participated in

in-person or online events, and the social media campaign has reached 2,085,692 people since its launch in 2019.

The Gaelic team continue to deliver Gaelic outreach activities under our **Plana Gàidhlig (Gaelic Language Plan)** 2023-2026. Between December 2023 and August 2024, the Gaelic team delivered tours or workshops to 556 school pupils from across Scotland who were in Gaelic-medium education or learning Gaelic at our sites including Edinburgh Castle, Fort George, and Stanley Mills.

The Gaelic team worked with the World Heritage team to create a Gaelic version of our **Go Auld Reekie** handling box. We celebrated **Gu Dùn Èideann** in June, with 48 Primary 5 pupils from Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce who enjoyed learning about their local history by investigating the past of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh through Gaelic activities at Riddle's Court and The Georgian House.

HES is proud to have achieved the LGBT Charter Mark, underscoring our commitment to inclusivity across all identities. Through the Charter Mark Programme, we delivered e-learning to 100 colleagues and a live



Improving Access Symposium



Doors Open Day 2023 at The Engine Shed

workshop for 25 senior leaders, with LGBT Youth Scotland reviewing our policies to ensure we promote an inclusive environment. The programme helped us to assess our strengths and areas for growth in diversity and inclusion. Surveys revealed that 83% of colleagues felt the programme positively impacted their work, with many appreciating the online training and awareness-raising sessions on LGBT+ terminology. Moreover, this achievement sets a positive example for other organisations in the sector and demonstrates to our visitors and stakeholders that we are a truly inclusive and equitable organisation.

In 2023-24, HES allocated £13.76 million in grants, supporting 341 heritage organisations, and leveraging an additional £3.92 for every £1 spent. 60% of the 341 organisations we have worked with over the last six years are charities. HES research shows positive impact of grants on local communities and economies. Examples include:

- **St Marys Lochee:** Restoration of Church in Lochee area in Dundee with many interpretation and engagement projects planned to allow the building to continue as a place of worship and an important community hub.
- **The Pipe Factory:** Repairs to a building including accessibility which will allow the building to continue as an accessible arts space and venue, for the use of the local community in the Calton area of Glasgow.
- **Roots Scotland:** The West of Scotland Regional Equality Council, through Roots Scotland, continues to bridge the gap between minority ethnic communities and the heritage sector. By providing training, consultancy, support, and advice, they have guided numerous organisations to better engage with minority ethnic communities, ensuring services are equitable, diverse, and inclusive.
- **Fife Employment Access Trust, Silverburn Flax Mill:** This £750k project, currently on-site, focuses on redeveloping the Silverburn Flax Mill into a café, shop, offices, meeting and events space, and hostel. Managed by the Fife Employment Access Trust (FEAT), a mental health organisation supporting people back into work, HES is aiding the repair elements of the scheme. The redevelopment aims to make the Mill the centrepiece of Silverburn Park. You can find out more about the project [online](#).



Edinburgh Pride 2024

In 2022, we published the **Youth Action Plan** in partnership with Young Scot, following the establishment of the HistoricScot Youth Forum in 2020. This forum brings together young people aged 11-25 to enhance youth engagement and foster a deeper connection to heritage. The Youth Action Plan sets out clear goals and actions aimed at inspiring long-term youth involvement in the heritage sector. To ensure its successful implementation, we have appointed a dedicated Youth Participation and Engagement Officer. They play a key role in working collaboratively with internal teams and external organisations to ensure the successful delivery of the Plan. They are also responsible for measuring progress and identifying any gaps, ensuring the Youth Action Plan achieves its goals and continues to evolve effectively.

HES launched the **Making Sense of Scotland** learning framework to make Scotland's historic environment a valued national resource for lifelong learning. The framework supports formal and informal education, prioritises diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing, and engages diverse audiences through outreach, partnerships, and creative initiatives. By leveraging archives, collections, and staff expertise, the programme promotes collaboration and cross-disciplinary approaches to support learning, skills development, and societal outcomes across the heritage sector. The framework creates the foundation for an ongoing approach to learning and outreach activity with a commitment to learning from others to drive continuous improvement.



Making Sense of Scotland launch at the Engine Shed



The Youth Action Plan was published in 2022



Making Sense of Scotland launch at the Engine Shed

Outcome 2: Our Services – We deliver responsive services to meet the needs and expectations of diverse groups

Over the past two years, we have successfully achieved our goal of delivering responsive services by actively engaging with new audiences and reaching out to groups who had not previously connected with us. By understanding the needs of diverse communities and building trust through meaningful collaboration, we co-designed initiatives that reflect their voices and expectations.

This has strengthened our commitment to inclusivity and ensured our services better meet the needs of all. Most of our projects build on our ongoing commitment to collaborative work. HES sites have served as powerful connections for communities and individuals often missing

from or disconnected from the heritage and historic environment. By co-designing with grassroots community groups, we've created opportunities for people to engage with their heritage and feel pride in it, regardless of who they are.

Daylight Learning and Inclusion project
group visit to Lavender Menace Queer
Archives, London Road, Edinburgh



Here are some examples that demonstrate our achievement of this outcome.

Community Outreach/Engagement Projects

Picturing Our Past, a three-year project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, was launched in September 2024. This project aims to help those with limited access to Scotland's heritage gain a better understanding of their roots and how history shapes us. Led by Inclusive Images in partnership with HES, the project worked with 11 community organisations from socially deprived areas, focusing on disabled people. Through participatory photography workshops and heritage photo walks, the project raised awareness and interest in local historic sites and iconic heritage locations. It has created spaces for often-ignored communities, fostering connections, building meaningful relationships, and empowering communities.

Participants have described the project as an empowering and life-changing experience.

You can read Steven's story here.

“I thought places like castles and museums were not for the likes of me, people where I'm from just don't go to these places.”

“When I think about history it's all about kings and queens, never really thought my family and what they have done was also part of the history.”

You can watch a series of videos created as part of the 'Picturing Our Past' project on YouTube.

As part of the **Managing Imperial Legacies Project**, Edinburgh Castle opened a sound-based exhibition called Nzira Yeparuware (A Path Upon a Rock) Sep-Nov 2023. This project, initially a partnership between HES, the University of Edinburgh, and the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, explores Scotland's



Steven, and other participants at the Picturing Our Past exhibition launch, held at Stirling Castle

connections to Zimbabwe through soundscapes and moving images. The exhibition, created by Harare-born artist Tanatsei Gambura, invited visitors to experience an intimate sound walk, blending Edinburgh's cityscape with Harare's auditory textures. We also developed a learning offer around the exhibition including digital resources which are still in use as a project legacy and facilitated visit from learning groups to engage with the exhibition on-site – this enabled more inclusive access.

“The politics of land and space underpin the injustices experienced by indigenous people on colonised sites. The ways we navigate the public realm, who owns land, who has access to space, the food we eat, policing, surveillance, and displacement all come into sharp focus. The exhibition maps a reconciliatory future that is firmly grounded in land-based gestures.”

Tanatsei Gambura

HES's Operations teams, in collaboration with the Equality team, launched a pilot project with **Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP)** to engage the travelling community and address their underrepresentation at heritage sites. They organised a successful event at Craigmillar Castle for Gypsy/Traveller families, who expressed interest in future engagement. This pilot event aimed to gauge attendance and preferences for future visits, ensuring that Gypsy/Traveller communities feel welcomed and included in the heritage experiences.

“I have lived in Edinburgh all my life and have never been to Craigmillar Castle before, I do not know why, I just did not think it would be for me – but I was wrong, I really enjoyed it. I'll definitely go back, on a warmer day! I would love to visit more places like this.”



Tanatsei Gambura with visitors at the launch of 'Nzira Yeparuware' – part of Managing Imperial Legacies

In a powerful blend of history, literature, and cultural reclamation, the **Readers of Colour** from **Glasgow Women's Library** visited Stirling Castle, a site traditionally distanced from their lived experiences. This group of women and non-binary people from minority ethnic backgrounds engaged with the Castle's rich history as part of an ongoing effort by our Equality team to foster inclusion and access to cultural heritage. The visit, organised with Stirling Castle's Learning and Inclusion team, provided an opportunity to explore and reinterpret a historic site where narratives have often excluded them. They reclaimed ownership and space by reading aloud in this setting, asserting their energy within the Castle's walls. This visit was more than just a day out – it was a statement of belonging, reminding us of the transformative impact when diverse communities are empowered to connect with their heritage in meaningful ways.

“For me, the trip is potentially an exciting model for an impactful equalities engagement practice.”

Lil Green, Engagement and Outreach Development Worker, Glasgow Women's Library

“Reading together at the castle opened up history, the landscape and the ways I understand myself in this country.”

We partnered with two Muslim community groups to deliver the **Eternal Connections project**, initiated in 2021 and mentioned in our **2023 Progress Report**. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Capability for Collections Fund, we used fragments from an Islamic glass vessel found through an archaeology dig at Caerlaverock Castle to explore questions of belonging and identity. Collaborating with a digital artist, our programme explored Scotland's connections to Islam and the Middle East, and what it means to be Muslim in modern Scotland. The project continues to evolve, with a second phase, The Art of Eternal Connections, planned for 2024/25 and 2025/26. **You can learn more about the Eternal Connections Project online.**

In September 2023, HES partnered with **Wise Women**, an organisation established in 1994 as the Women's Safety Centre, to address women's fears of crime and violence through self-defence and personal safety courses. Wise Women contributed not only to increasing



Muslim Scouts undertaking a creative practice workshop, part of the Eternal Connections project

women's sense of safety and confidence but also to broader strategies for reducing violence against women in Glasgow. Together, HES and Wise Women explored the history of violence against women through artefacts and historical sites. The women appreciated their visit to the Castle, noting challenges in surrounding areas, and valued the opportunity to understand women's historical experiences of violence and lack of institutional protection. Wise Women expressed gratitude for the partnership and looked forward to future collaborations.

In March 2023, at Stirling Castle we hosted a vibrant Nowruz festival with Kurdish Women's Group as part of our ongoing engagement with the **Eternal Connections project**. Families celebrated with pride and joy, enjoying singing, dancing, and tours of the Castle. Participants described the event as a beautiful fusion of Scottish heritage and their own traditions, creating a new, inclusive cultural experience that fostered harmony and a sense of belonging.

Creative Caerlaverock is an inspiring collaboration with the Stove Network, designed to foster creative learning and engagement with underrepresented groups in the art and heritage

sectors. The project started with the vision that Caerlaverock Castle is not just a site of historical significance but a canvas for creative discovery and the uncovering of new narratives. Through this innovative approach, Creative Caerlaverock reimagines heritage spaces as platforms where diverse voices can connect, create, and share stories that resonate with today's communities. One standout example of this is a Dungeons and Dragons live roleplaying event held with a local youth group, where participants explored the castle in a unique and interactive way, blending history with imaginative storytelling.

The project '**Who Will Be Remembered Here**' explored the experiences of queer individuals throughout history, whose lives have been erased or marginalised. It aims to create a sense of kinship and intimacy with these stories while highlighting the diverse experiences of queer people living in Scotland today. Through a series of short films, a book, a photographic exhibition, and community engagement projects, four queer writers – working in British Sign Language, English, Gaelic, and Scots – responded to HES sites. The project, set to conclude in 2025, seeks to weave queer histories into Scotland's national narrative.



Premiere of 'Who Will Be Remembered Here'

Tailored Services

To improve access for young people, we continued our **£1 initiative** from April 2021 to September 2024, attracting 56,543 visitors using the YoungScot £1 offer.

In 2023, we began sponsoring the **Inclusive Tourism Award** at the Scottish Thistle Awards, the national tourism industry awards.

We introduced the **‘Historic Sundays’** initiative, offering free entry to our sites for Scottish residents on the first Sunday of every month from October to March. This initiative aims to attract new audiences by removing the pay barrier, and we plan to continue it in 2025 with improved targeting of underrepresented groups.

We list our sites on **Euan’s Guide**, a disabled access review website, providing detailed access information and links to our access guides and statements.

Stirling Castle hosted the **OMOS exhibition** which celebrated black excellence, working with cabaret and dance performers to respond to untold black history and a forgotten connection to Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

HES is continuously improving accessibility across its sites. A great example of this is the introduction of **Sensory Backpacks**, which visitors can borrow from the ticket office. These backpacks are designed to enhance the visitor experience and include a variety of sensory aids such as earplugs, tactile toys, sunglasses, binoculars, a wind-up torch, a sand timer, and a sensory map. These thoughtful additions help make our historic sites more accessible and enjoyable for all visitors.



Promoting Historic Sundays at Stirling Castle



Edinburgh Castle Child's Sensory Backpack

As part of our commitment to inclusive access HES delivers two essential services:

- **Free Learning Visits** enables qualifying learning groups to access our sites. We work to make the scheme as inclusive as possible and regularly review the qualifying criteria. In line with our Learning and Inclusion offer we have continued to extend the offer for organisations who support vulnerable groups including refugees and those with additional support needs that increasingly come under wellbeing and health and social and economic categories. This has enabled us to respond to societal pressures such as the cost-of-living crisis and mental health provision.
- We continue to manage the **Scottish Government's Travel Subsidy for Schools** which continues to break down one of the key barriers to accessing heritage sites.



A group of young people outside Craigmillar Castle

We have also developed **Black History Month** outreach workshops for schools which are proving popular with teachers as a way to integrate anti-racism into the curriculum.

Over the past two years, we continue to participate in **Pride** events across Scotland to promote inclusivity within the heritage sector. A key aspect of this initiative involved collaborating with the National Library of Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, and National Galleries of Scotland to organise joint events in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dundee, as well as additional events in Dumfries, Stirling, and the Highlands. The goal of these Pride events is to ensure that HES and our broader society become more inclusive for LGBT+ people.



Colleagues at Edinburgh Pride 2024

To widen access to employment, 51 individuals, representing 2.8% of our workforce, are engaged in apprenticeships. While this figure is below our target, these opportunities have significantly impacted participants, equipping them with valuable skills and experiences, including:

- We supported widening access to employment in the sector by recruiting a two-year **Collections Management Apprentice**. The individual was supported by HES and Museums Galleries Scotland to complete a Level 3 Modern Apprenticeship Diploma in Museum and Galleries Practice at SCQF Level 7. This award aims to offer an alternative to the degree level qualifications that have traditionally been asked for by employers, with the goal of building a more diverse and inclusive workforce.
- We participated in the **New Museum School Advanced Programme**, a joint initiative between Culture& and the University of Leicester. This programme provides the opportunity for UK-based individuals from

diverse backgrounds underrepresented in the sector to progress their careers through supported study for a postgraduate level qualification. HES was a sponsor organisation for the first two cohorts of this programme, which included supporting a 'project in practice' work experience module for two students.

- In 2023-24, we offered **18 Trainee, Craft Fellow, and Apprenticeship positions**. We hosted the annual Celebrating Success event at the Engine Shed, honouring Apprentices, Trainees, and Craft Fellows, and introducing new awards for skills experience roles. As Scotland's lead body for the historic environment, HES is committed to addressing the traditional skills shortage by expanding training opportunities, and ensuring young professionals gain hands-on experience in heritage conservation. Through these efforts, HES is cultivating a new generation of skilled workers, safeguarding Scotland's heritage while driving innovation in the sector.



Apprentice stonemason working on their competition piece at the SkillBuild Qualifier Competition 2024



Apprentice Awards 2024 at the Engine Shed

Research Projects

The results of our **Properties in Care and the British Empire project**, commissioned in December 2021, reveal that 126 of our properties (37.5% of our estate) have identifiable imperial connections. This research, conducted by experts from the University of Glasgow, highlights properties with ties to colonialism and the transatlantic slave economy. Our internal steering group is incorporating these findings into site interpretations, Statements of Significance, and future exhibitions. Our Learning and Inclusion team will use the report to ensure our programmes remain inclusive and historically comprehensive. We have created information sheets for properties with clear imperial connections and provided training on Workplace Equality in the Heritage Sector. We continue to engage with communities and aligned organisations, contributing to the national conversation on this important topic. Our Learning and Inclusion team will use the report to ensure our programmes remain inclusive and historically comprehensive and

are developing a specific engagement strand through our 'Making History' programme in partnership with Craft Scotland which will enable communities to reflect on the themes through creative co-design; a process launched with a Re-Symposium event held in Glasgow in September 2024.

We have conducted new research into our collections at Trinity House Maritime Museum to include those previously left out of the traditional narrative. This effort has led to rewriting our standard tour script, creating a dedicated Black History Month tour, and collaborating with the University of Stirling to host a Collaborative Doctoral Award PhD candidate. These initiatives aim to make our storytelling and content more inclusive.



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

Trust Building Initiatives

In developing our **Equality Outcomes for 2025-29** and the **BSL Plan for 2024-30**, we actively engaged with a variety of community groups, individuals, and organisations. Our aim was to understand how to remove barriers and make our organisation and historic environment more inclusive and accessible. Through this process, we successfully built trust with groups often underrepresented in the heritage sector, including disability advocates, LGBT+ individuals, gypsy/travelling communities, socio-economically diverse groups, ethnic minorities, neurodiverse individuals, those with learning disabilities, age-diverse groups, single parents, and young people. We were honoured to forge meaningful connections with these communities and welcome them to our sites, enriching our work and ensuring our heritage is more inclusive and representative of everyone.

Inclusive Publication and Visibility

We have made significant strides in ensuring our publications and communications reflect and celebrate diversity. This includes featuring diverse voices and perspectives, using inclusive language, and ensuring that our materials are accessible to all. These efforts are enhancing our visibility and demonstrating our commitment to inclusivity and representation.

Blogs on the following subjects can be found on our website:

- [Gaelic history](#)
- [Gypsy, Roma & Traveller history](#)
- [Women's history](#)
- [South Asian heritage](#)
- [LGBT+ history](#)
- [Black history](#)



Participants of the Daylight Learning and Inclusion project

Outcome 3: Our People – We attract, recruit and develop a diverse Board, workforce, and volunteer base

We have made a significant shift in advancing equality and inclusion, not only within our workforce but also in influencing others beyond the organisation. This progress is clearly demonstrated in our report.

One of the major changes is the expansion of our Equality team, now including an Equalities Manager, Equalities Officer, a Youth Participation and Engagement Officer (two years' fixed term), and an Accessibility and Inclusion Intern (placement completed in December 2024). Additionally, we have a dedicated Digital Accessibility Lead, focusing on enhancing digital accessibility across HES, further underscoring our commitment to creating an inclusive environment for all.

In May 2023, we held an event led by the Director of Operations, where community partners shared their insights and ideas to help address challenges in building a more inclusive workforce. Key discussions included strategies to improve workplace inclusion, such as reducing unconscious bias in recruitment, implementing sensory awareness training, and developing an Employee passport for requesting adjustments. We also explored innovative interview methods and proactive outreach to address potential barriers. Ongoing efforts will involve regularly reviewing diversity metrics and retention rates to ensure continued progress. Since then, we have implemented many of these recommendations, and they are having a positive impact on our organisation.

Scotland's Urban
Past project



Below is a summary of our achievements over the past two years, including highlights of key projects.

We have been awarded the **Menopause Friendly Accreditation**. To achieve this, we were assessed by an independent panel, showcasing our effectiveness across six key areas: culture, policies and practices, training, engagement, facilities, and evaluation. The accreditation is industry-recognised and the only one that sets clear standards which must be met. It is considered by many as a mark of excellence for menopause in the workplace.

Our **International Women's Day** events in March 2023 and 2024 have been instrumental in driving change within the organisation by addressing wider inequalities and structural systems impacting all genders. These events created a courageous space for colleagues to come together, celebrate successes, challenge existing practices, learn, and raise awareness around gender issues. Our Women's Equity Network has been actively campaigning for uniform equity and challenging everyday sexism, ensuring that meaningful progress is made. Going forward, this event will continue to be

held annually, supported by various directorates, and sponsored by Director sponsors, solidifying our commitment to promoting gender equality across the organisation.

We achieved **Disability Confident Level 3** accreditation under the Government's Disability Confident Scheme, demonstrating our leadership in promoting disability inclusion. This milestone reflects our commitment to creating an inclusive work environment and supporting individuals with disabilities. This accreditation enables us to attract, recruit, and retain diverse talent, enhancing our organisation with a wealth of ideas and perspectives.

Over the past two years, we have made significant progress, including forming partnerships with the **Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE)**, **Age Scotland**, and **Inclusion Scotland**, launching an Inclusive Recruitment policy, providing training on autism, neurodiversity, and



HES Senior Leaders on International Women's Day 2025

dementia, and establishing a Disability Forum. We were also honoured with the Employer Champion award at the 2023 SUSE Awards for our diversity efforts.

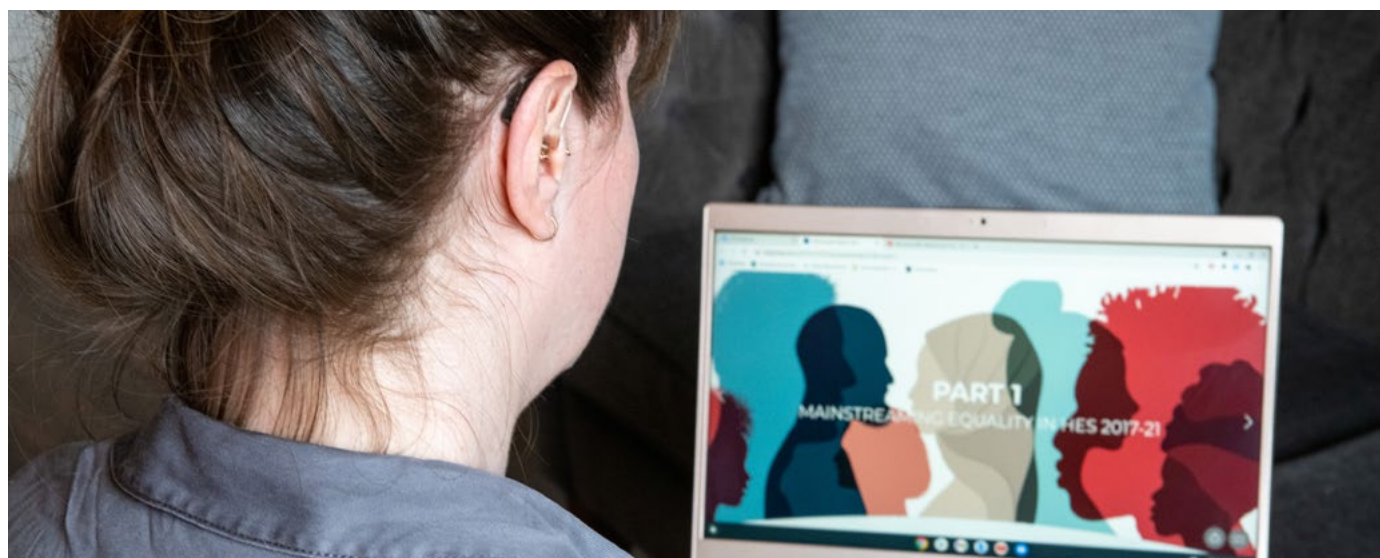
We have implemented **maternity coaching** to support individuals transitioning to working parenthood. This initiative addresses the emotional and practical challenges of returning to work after maternity leave, helping with work-life balance, confidence building, and career progression.

We have established a network of trained **Mental Health First Aiders** (MHFAs) of HES colleagues who provide confidential, non-judgemental support, offer reassurance, and guide individuals toward appropriate professional help, fostering a supportive workplace environment.

We have **transformed our resourcing approach** by streamlining processes from application to onboarding. This initiative aims to enhance the applicant and onboarding experience, improve accessibility by ensuring compliance with modern standards, and support the development of a more diverse and inclusive talent pool.

The continued implementation and maintenance of **flexible working arrangements** have made a significant positive impact on the workplace, being hugely valued by all colleagues.

We have successfully implemented **Menopause and Carers passports** and, in 2024, introduced a new **Employee passport** for colleagues with disabilities or specific needs. This tool outlines individual accommodation requirements to help them perform their job effectively. Due to the positive impact of the Menopause and Carers passports on colleague wellbeing, we are launching a combined, user-friendly passport to support discussions with line managers or co-workers. The Employee passport allows colleagues with disabilities or long-term health conditions to confidentially address their physical and mental health, stress levels, work-life balance, and other support needs. We remain committed to providing necessary adjustments and fostering open conversations to ensure all colleagues receive the support they need.



An HES colleague wearing a hearing aid and looking at the Equalities, Maternity and Menopause policies on HESnet

Our **seven employee forums**, the Disability Forum, Thinking Differently Forum (for Neurodiversity), LGBT+ Network, Women's Equity Network, Youth Forum, Wellbeing Forum, and Global Diversity Network, play a crucial role in amplifying the voices of colleagues with lived experiences and driving meaningful change across our organisation. These colleague-led forums provide vital support and advice, and their role and position have been strengthened, giving them a say in shaping our policies and practices. Each forum is empowered with its own budget and receives support from a sponsor Director within the Executive Leadership Team, further solidifying their influence in promoting inclusivity and fostering positive change.

During the 2024 race riots and civil unrest in the UK, our **Global Diversity Network** played a crucial role in raising awareness and offering a safe space for colleagues to ask questions and seek support. HES colleagues greatly appreciated the network's support and its impactful campaigns during this challenging time, which fostered understanding and solidarity within our community.

HES launched **A Day to Make a Difference** which offers colleagues the opportunity to support and help others during working time.

Our **Age Inclusive Matrix** (AIM) initiative, in partnership with Age Scotland, has driven significant advancements in age inclusivity. We've revamped our onboarding process, enhanced mentoring programmes, and expanded learning and development opportunities to support employees of all ages. Our efforts include facilitating employee network discussions, running awareness campaigns on age-related issues, and organising webinars on age inclusion. We've also achieved Carer Positive status, updated our recruitment system, and introduced flexible working policies. Ongoing priorities include raising awareness, supporting younger employees, fostering open conversations, promoting continuous learning, and engaging with community groups. Through these initiatives, HES is enhancing workplace inclusivity, addressing ageism, and striving to create a supportive environment for all employees while setting a positive example for others.



Colleagues presenting at Conserve Ourselves



Colleagues taking part in a Day to Make a Difference

The **Human Library Card** initiative was launched, offering HES colleagues a unique opportunity to explore diverse human experiences. Over the past two years, the initiative received enthusiastic acclaim, leading to a high demand for more inspiring sessions. In response, we partnered with the Human Library Organisation to expand the programme and make it accessible to all colleagues. The Human Library operates as a platform where individuals share their personal narratives instead of traditional books. Participants engage in 30-minute conversations with ‘books’ – volunteers who offer captivating life stories and unique perspectives. This initiative aims to challenge taboos, dismantle stereotypes, and foster dialogue, empathy, and understanding. By promoting respectful, open-minded interactions, the Human Library helps break stereotypes, build empathy, and strengthen community connections.

Our continuous training and development programme underscores our commitment to colleague wellbeing and inclusivity through a variety of focused sessions. We offer training on the Neuroscience of Stress, Hard of Hearing and British Sign Language Learning, Stress Management for Managers, and Mental Health Awareness for Managers. Additionally, we host Menopause and Carers Talking Circles, and events such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women and Vision Awareness sessions. We also address key diversity and inclusion topics through training on Islamophobia Awareness, as well as celebrating Black History Month, Disability History Month, South Asian History Month, and Men’s Mental Health Month. The Focus Lounge series supports productivity through body doubling. These initiatives, along with mandatory equality, diversity and inclusion e-learning and classroom-based inclusion training for all managers to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all colleagues.



‘Happy to Chat’ bench – designed to help combat loneliness and encourage community interaction



Colleagues catching up in the Longmore House café

Conclusion

Our recent initiatives and achievements underscore our dedication to fostering inclusivity and diversity within our organisation.

By actively reaching out to underrepresented groups, implementing innovative recruitment practices, and addressing feedback, we have made significant strides in creating a more inclusive environment. Our commitment extends to continually improving our policies and practices, ensuring that diverse perspectives are valued and reflected. We remain proactive in engaging with those who are missing and strive to enhance our approach to better serve and represent all communities.

Learning and
Development Business
Partner, Graziella Welsh





HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

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Historic Environment Scotland

Longmore House, Salisbury Place,
Edinburgh EH9 1SH



0131 668 8600



hes.scot

Historic Environment Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC045925

Registered Address: Longmore House,
Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH



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