

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND



UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA



The Improving Access Project was established to investigate and address the systemic barriers preventing equitable access to careers within Scotland's heritage sector. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project examined how longstanding practices, cultural norms, and structural inequalities shape workforce participation, particularly for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, disabled people, and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Using a mixed-methods approach, and including focus groups, surveys, and co-design workshops, the project identified the primary obstacles to workforce entry and progression, as well as the sector's capacity to implement transformative change.

Key findings

1. Underrepresentation and cultural exclusion

Marginalised communities consistently reported feeling invisible within heritage narratives and workforce structures. BME individuals and disabled people are significantly underrepresented in senior roles, reinforcing a cycle where leadership lacks diversity and organisational strategies fail to centre inclusion.

2. Exclusionary recruitment practices

Bias in recruitment was evident across multiple data sources. The sector relies heavily on unpaid internships and volunteer work as entry points, disadvantaging those who cannot afford to work for free. Job advertisements often used inaccessible or exclusive language, and only a minority of organisations employed anonymised recruitment processes.

3. Financial barriers

Unpaid or underpaid work-based learning opportunities were identified as a major barrier for those from lower-income backgrounds. These practices limit who can access the sector and contribute to a workforce that does not reflect Scotland's communities.

4. Insufficient support for disabled staff

Disabled employees reported a lack of reasonable adjustments, limited peer support, fear of disclosing disabilities, and punitive HR policies. Many felt excluded from workplace culture and lacked clear development pathways.

5. Geographic inequalities

Urban organisations, particularly in Glasgow and Edinburgh, had greater infrastructure and resources to support diversity and inclusion initiatives. Rural

organisations reported capacity constraints that limited their ability to implement similar measures.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen representation and leadership diversity

Introduce targeted leadership development programmes, mentorship schemes, and measurable diversity targets to improve representation of BME and disabled individuals at senior levels.

2. Reform recruitment

Adopt anonymised and skills-based recruitment processes, remove degree requirements where unnecessary, and ensure accessible, inclusive job descriptions distributed through diverse networks.

3. Ensure financial inclusion

Make all internships, traineeships, and entry-level roles paid at the Living Wage. Establish shared funding models to support smaller and rural organisations to provide paid opportunities.

4. Improve support for disabled employees

Proactively provide reasonable adjustments, create well-resourced disability peer networks, and deliver meaningful Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training—especially for managers.

5. Address regional disparities

Develop regional resource-sharing hubs and collaborations, supporting rural organisations to implement inclusive practices and build local recruitment pipelines.

6. Introduce a sector-wide accountability framework

Require annual reporting on workforce diversity, inclusion practices, and progress toward targets, overseen by a national body to ensure transparency and support continuous improvement.

Improving access visual summary

The Improving Access project explores how to **remove barriers** to the heritage sector's workforce in Scotland – identifying the cultures, processes, and structures that discriminate, and understanding how we, as a sector, can **embed practice** that supports **transformative change**.



Or visit www.museumsgallerysscotland.org.uk/project/improving-access



What have we learned?

- Visibility, representation, and awareness are key issues
- People don't see their stories reflected in heritage sites or staff
- Minority communities aren't present in decision-making tables, senior leadership or boards
- There's a lack of Gaelic and Scots speakers and representation



The main recruitment barriers

- High demand for a few jobs, often concentrated in central regions
- A lack of awareness of heritage careers
- Little to no engagement with ethnic minority groups
- Hiring and recruitment processes can be strict and exclusionary, using complex language and requesting excessive experience, while providing little support or guidance, and no feedback
- No diversity in recruitment panels leading to misunderstandings, microaggressions and interviewee needs not being met
- Competency-based interviews, which can disadvantage neurodiverse applicants
- Roles are mostly part time or fixed-term, leading to financial and job insecurity
- A lack of reasonable adjustments for disabled staff, and punitive, stressful sickness absence policies



Key recommendations for the sector

- Engage with schools, communities, and faith groups to raise awareness of the sector
- Create paid, targeted placement schemes for underrepresented groups
- Make diversity and inclusion an organisational priority led by leadership, and collaborate across the sector – taking risks and sharing learning
- Reduce emphasis on degrees and volunteering experience for jobseekers, provide support for disabled people, and address visa barriers
- Anonymised recruitment, using accessible language and alternatives to long, inaccessible application forms – use CVs instead
- Avoid competency-based interviews and offer pre-interview conversations
- Provide staff with support, better training, and more compassionate policies



Hopes for the future

- More alternative pathways
- More diversity and inclusivity, in every way
- More funding, security and growth
- More recognition of the sector's importance
- Better volunteering practices
- Better training and support from industry experts
- More action, less talk



What have we learned?



Visibility, representation, and awareness are key issues



People don't see their stories reflected in heritage sites or staff



Minority communities aren't present in decision-making tables, senior leadership or boards



There's a lack of Gaelic and Scots speakers and representation



The main recruitment barriers

Saturated job market

High demand for a few jobs, often concentrated in central regions

Low engagement

Little to no engagement with ethnic minority groups

No diversity

No diversity in recruitment panels leading to misunderstandings, microaggressions and interviewee needs not being met

Lack of full-time roles

Roles are mostly part time or fixed-term, leading to financial and job insecurity

Low awareness

A lack of awareness of heritage careers

Hiring processes

Hiring and recruitment processes can be strict and exclusionary, using complex language and requesting excessive experience, while providing little support or guidance, and no feedback

Interview format

Competency-based interviews, which can disadvantage neurodiverse applicants

Inflexible policies

A lack of reasonable adjustments for disabled staff, and punitive, stressful sickness absence policies



Key recommendations for the sector

Raise awareness

Engage with schools, communities, and faith groups to raise awareness of the sector

Prioritise diversity

Make diversity and inclusion an organisational priority led by leadership, and collaborate across the sector – taking risks and sharing learning

Anonymised recruitment

Anonymised recruitment, using accessible language and alternatives to long, inaccessible application forms – use CVs instead

Support and training

Provide staff with support, better training, and more compassionate policies

Placement schemes

Create paid, targeted placement schemes for underrepresented groups

Reconsider requirements

Reduce emphasis on degrees and volunteering experience for jobseekers, provide support for disabled people, and address visa barriers

Improve interview process

Avoid competency-based interviews and offer pre-interview conversations



Hopes for the future



More alternative pathways



More diversity and inclusivity, in every way



More funding, security and growth



More recognition of the sector's importance



Better volunteering practices



Better training and support from industry experts



More action, less talk

[Back to overview](#)

Improving access spring symposium

Visual notes were created for the Improving Access Spring Symposium, where sector partners came together to listen and learn from each other. These can be seen on the next page, but a full description will be provided here:

Focus groups identified key barriers to the sector via regional, sustainable pathways from school to work. Barriers and stereotypes include negative attitudes towards disabled people, visibly or not visible disabled. We must change the way we think about disability. Seeing disabled representation as an approach makes people want to stay. The more visibility there is, the more stereotypes can be changed. In archaeology, enabled archaeology is where CRIP theory and adopting the social model intersect.

The symposium identified supporting policies and processes in the workplace to improve access, including: creating safe spaces to share experiences; improving on recruitment, induction and progression; sharing questions before the interview for better results; combat unconscious bias and microaggressions; supportive policies e.g. disability leave; meaningful staff surveys to influence organisations; better training and peer support opportunities; and improved communication throughout organisations.

Groups were tasked to ask themselves, 'what's your inclusive philosophy?'. Workforce for the Future aims to de-mystify careers. In exhibitions, interpretation exercises could have people use their skills to tell a multi-sensory story.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work is personal and intense. By using the adaptive change model, we can and are getting better at dealing with conflict. Culture and behaviours drive this model and workforce inclusion.

When identifying issues and developing new approaches, new types of funding were discussed and three phases identified for heritage innovation: explore, test and grow. Without diversity and representation, EDI officers cannot do their jobs. They should go out there and talk to people about their experiences, rather than relying on procedure. There are other ways of recognising a person's value, and this is a critical part of how we can support marginalised people to stay.

We need to demystify the application process and make clear what information is required at what stage. People can't address what they don't know. There are barriers in online portals. Keep disabled people at the heart of changes. Reduce the disability employment gap. There are several considerations re: disclosing disability including: positive and negative effects; support networks; reasonable adjustments; and the '[why you askin](#)' campaign. A framework should engage with a lived

experience network, disabled people, multi-vocal narratives, and have a better understanding of the past.

We should celebrate people, indigenous voices, and our connections to the world. A panel identified barriers including xenophobia, patronising people of colour, and how the sector measures success and experience. Support from family and counsellors is important. We need to champion anti-racism, transparency, kindness, progressivism, respect, and diverse welfare and audiences.

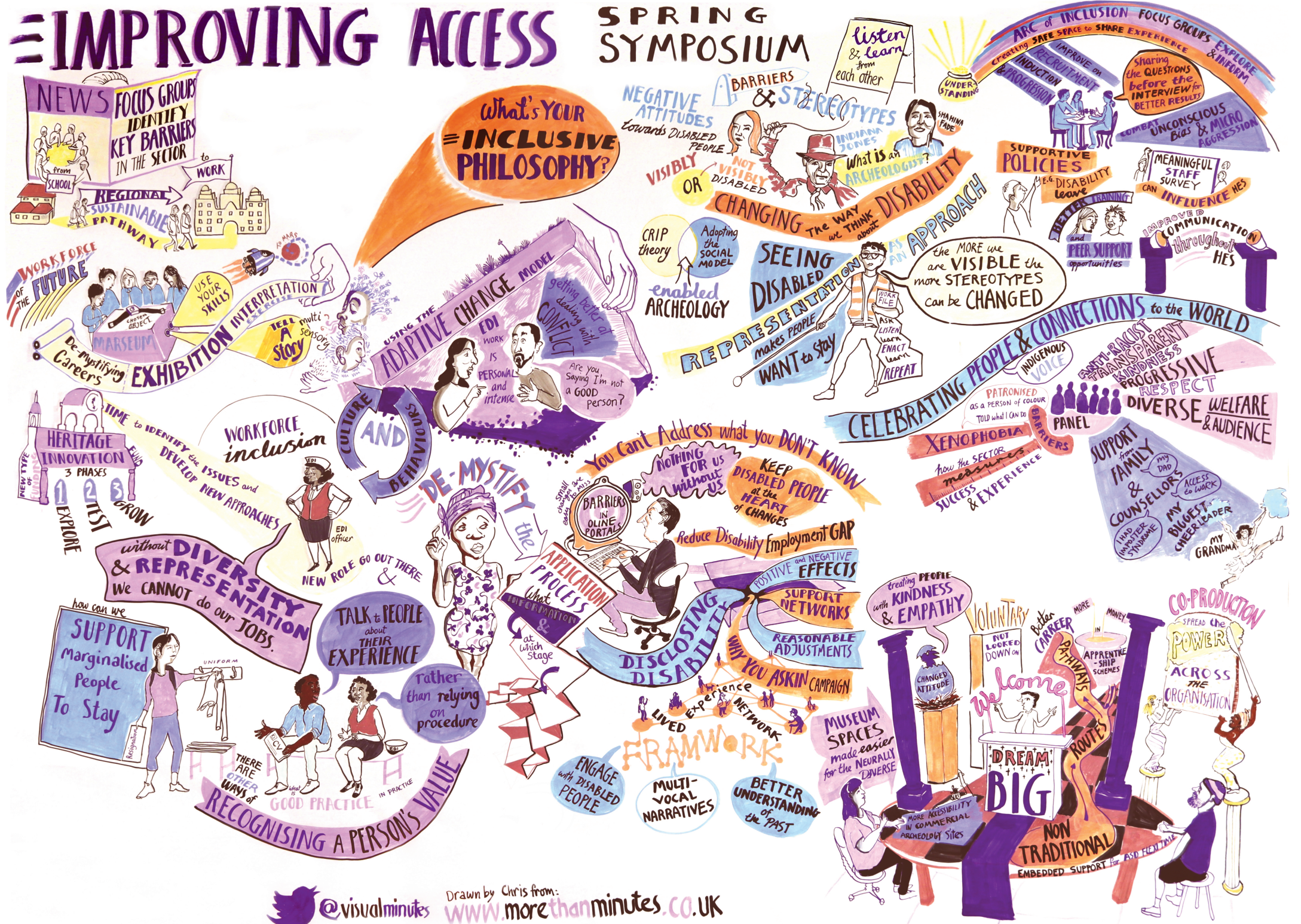
In order to properly welcome people and enable them to 'dream big', we have to: change attitudes and treat people with kindness and empathy; don't look down on volunteers; provide better non-traditional career pathways and routes; embed support for additional support needs (flexi time); engage with co-production and spreading power across the organisation; have more accessibility in commercial archaeology sites; and make museum spaces easier for the neurally diverse.

Participants included: Historic Environment Scotland, the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, the University of Edinburgh, the Enabled Archaeology Foundation, the National Trust for Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland, the Scottish Crannog Centre, and the West of Scotland Regional Equality Council. The visual summary of the symposium minutes as provided by @visualminutes (on Twitter/X) and drawn by Chris from: www.morethanminutes.co.uk.

Please see the illustration of the visual summary of minutes on the next page.

IMPROVING ACCESS

SPRING SYMPOSIUM



@visualminutes

Drawn by Chris from:
www.morethanminutes.co.uk

Conclusion

The Improving Access Project clearly demonstrates that exclusion within Scotland's heritage workforce is systemic, multi-layered, and deeply embedded in established practices. While national policies emphasise diversity and inclusion, implementation remains inconsistent—especially in rural areas and in relation to leadership diversity, recruitment practices, and support for disabled staff. The project successfully identified both the cultures and structures that perpetuate inequality and surfaced practical, co-designed solutions to deliver long-term, transformative change.

Embedding these recommendations at sector level is essential to ensuring a future heritage workforce that reflects Scotland's diverse communities, strengthens sector sustainability, and enables heritage organisations to better serve the public they represent.