

CEEAC Call For Views: ‘Culture in Communities’

Question 1:

Please tell us about cultural activities you run in your local area. For example: what support has there been in place to develop and grow cultural activities or events in your local area? What barriers have you faced? Is there anything you would like to deliver but don't have the means to? What needs to be in place to enable or to support a variety of cultural activities or events being organised and delivered in your local area?

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) is the lead public body for historic environment in Scotland. We are a non-departmental public body and a registered Scottish charity. Our corporate plan, [Heritage for All](#), shapes our activities to ensure that the historic environment makes a real difference to people's lives. Outcome 4 in the plan is for the historic environment to inspire a creative and vibrant Scotland, and, with its focus on Culture and Arts, this outcome supports a 'place-based' approach to Culture.

Scotland's historic environment provides inspiration to millions of people, and influences everything from music, literature, and art, to theatre, film and gaming. As an organisation, we are constantly seeking new, immersive, and engaging ways to help learners, visitors, and the casually curious to find, explore, use, and enjoy their historic environment for creative, cultural, and wellbeing purposes.

As the lead public body for the historic environment in Scotland, we lead on *Our Place in Time* (OPiT), Scotland's national strategy for the historic environment. The strategy sets out a high-level strategic framework for the historic environment, and is currently undergoing a refresh with a new strategy to be released in Spring 2023. OPiT sets out a vision of how our historic environment can be understood, valued, cared for, and enjoyed, and ensures that the cultural, social, environmental, and economic value of Scotland's heritage makes a strong contribution to the wellbeing of the nation and its people.

Scope of HES's contribution to local cultural activities

While we manage over 300 Properties in Care (PICs) in localities across Scotland, our key focus to contributing to local cultural activities occurs at our 75 staffed properties, and a further 15 properties managed by local partnerships. The number of visitors we welcome varies from 1.5M at Edinburgh Castle, 500,000 at Glasgow Cathedral to 2,000 at Dundrennan Abbey (pre covid numbers).

All visitors to the PICs receive a locally focused cultural heritage experience and many of our properties host cultural heritage events that HES or local communities have developed and delivered, covering both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. We also deliver digital events and host a range of volunteers from within communities. These volunteers help deliver visitor events such as guided walks and specialist activity sessions that link to the heritage of the PIC.

We run a programme of annual events for visitors at our PICs that tries to reach local authority areas across Scotland. This programme features a range of events which are targeted primarily at families, members and visitors local to the sites. They range in size from *Spectacular Jousting* at Linlithgow Palace (c10,000 visitors over the 2-day weekend event) to single person 'added value' living history performances. Most events take place between April and October, with several such as the *Castle of Light* at Edinburgh Castle and *Christmas theatre* at Stirling Castle taking place in

the festive period. Most of the events are themed to the sites' historical connections or are creative stages for music or theatre.

In addition to cultural activities at PICs, we support a range of cultural activities, most of which are engagement activities related to our regulatory and conservation services. Examples of these activities are engagement workshops related to World Heritage, Scotland's Archaeology Strategy, and supporting communities to engage with, and record, their built heritage, and engage with the designation process and management of the historic environment. We carry out very focused public education sessions to promote World Heritage in Scotland, this includes events with costumed actors representing key historical figures and handling boxes.

What support is in place to develop and grow cultural activities

Creating community connection and co-designing with communities through meaningful cultural engagement has been a focus for us over the past two years. We have maintained an intersectional approach and successfully established relationships with external community-led groups and organisations, including disability advocacy groups, youth groups, ethnic minority organisations, and LGBT+ groups, to ensure that we involve and consult people on issues that affect them. Projects and activities mentioned below demonstrate our efforts in building close partnerships with communities and community-based organisations. We have been actively seeking out organisations and groups who can help us to understand and connect with the people we need to be working with and for. Our dedicated page [Communities | Historic Environment Scotland](#) has been created to provide information and resources we offer to the communities.

Our visitor events are primarily managed by a centralised Events team (aside from some outlying events) and funded internally (aside for occasional Event Scotland funding through their funding programmes). With a large estate, there are always opportunities to do more, but staff and budget resources limit this. Larger events take a significant amount of planning including the performances, ticketing, catering, parking, health and safety, operational staffing, marketing, and security. Similarly, some individual properties are more suited than others, with a focus on those where we have adequate outdoor spaces, staff facilities, good transport links, parking options, regular operational staff, and other factors. Several events involve working with partners, primarily those where we already have existing relationships through our usual operations. There is potential to make more use of these and new partnerships, although resourcing is a challenge in building these, with most time spent planning and delivering events, and partner organisations frequently having their own resourcing challenges.

As part of our national offer our Learning and Inclusion team run several services, programmes and partnership projects in local areas across Scotland. These provide enhanced access and participative opportunities for diverse groups and learners of all ages and focus on both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Where we work is often determined by the locations of specific sites in our care or through targeting specific areas and audiences to increase the diversity of heritage engagement, such as our storytelling focused programme at Trinity House, Edinburgh which engaged with local primary and high schools in Leith. Working in partnership is key to delivering successful and inclusive cultural activities in a local area. This enables us to use heritage sites and collections in creative ways to theme and inspire activities which support local initiatives and programmes or engage new audiences. The creative arts provide a fantastic way to bring people together, engage groups with no previous interest, and support wider initiatives, such as wellbeing and skills for life and work. Cross sector partnerships enable professionals and practitioners to learn from each other and share best practice which often leads to sustainable relationships and legacy elements. Some selected examples include:

- Creative Caerlaverock (partnership with the Stove Network, Dumfries & Galloway) - an innovative community centred approach is developing the potential of Caerlaverock Castle and its grounds as an inclusive creative learning hub for the local area and a steppingstone to the wider heritage of Dumfries and Galloway.
- Heritage Remixed (various local youth work and creative arts partners) - a simple but effective concept which engages young people new to heritage through cross sector partnerships between heritage, youth work and the creative arts.
- Making History (partnership with Craft Scotland) – working to an annual theme this project pairs practising contemporary makers with learning or community groups who work together to create new work inspired by the heritage in their local area.

What challenges have we faced and what we have done to address

We face specific challenges and barriers at a site level, however, the biggest barriers we face as a collective organisation is an awareness and understanding of our role, and the competing demands on resources and staff, and the broader contribution that the historic environment makes to places in Scotland.

The pandemic has brought many challenges and highlighted the inequalities already present in our society. We recognize that we have a long way to go to address these inequalities. Through the feedback we received, we believe our ongoing engagement resulted in positive impacts on our communities.

As part of our Equality Action Plan, and our commitment to heritage for all, we developed and published our position on heritage, history, and race. Through this statement, we aim to empower and enable our colleagues to take effective action in addressing inequalities and build relationships with our diverse communities in a manner that acknowledges our shared history, tells all sides of the story candidly, builds trust, and brings our communities together.

For instance, a major piece work has been our *Managing Imperial Legacies* project: A two-year partnership project between HES, University of Edinburgh, and the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, funded by a Royal Society of Edinburgh networking grant. The project enabled conversations involving academics, heritage organisations, professionals, and communities to focus on discussions linked to Empire and Scotland's built environment (including but not limited to the transatlantic slave trade).

During the last few years, HES has focused on delivering or participating in a range of digital outreach events, many of which had a focus on a geographical area and celebrating that areas' culture and heritage. The following are some examples of collaborative digital events, demonstrating HES's commitment to working within the heritage sector, and across other sectors:

- Scotland's Community Heritage Conversations – This programme ran free online events in 2021. Through showcasing local culture and heritage examples, subjects have covered community heritage's relationship to the arts, music, wellbeing, skills, digital, young people, climate change, and creativity.
- Our Community Connections Forum – This was used to host multiple online events over 2021 and 2022. This included community development forums, free online [Make Your Mark](#) Knowledge Share events that were open to volunteer involving organisations, and a bespoke 'Meet the Experts' event for the Coalfields Community Landscape Partnership and a 'Caring for Our Heritage' event attended by over 90 US members.

To enable or support diverse cultural heritage events that are community owned and delivered, it is important that communities are inspired and supported to understand and interpret their locality. To help achieve this HES launched our '*Talking About Heritage*' series of online resources in March 2022, with the aim of encouraging communities to start conversations around the heritage that is important to them. These downloadable resources have been specifically created for use by community groups or individuals.

All the above examples highlight that working in partnership to support wider local needs is key to delivering successful and inclusive cultural activities in a local area. This enables us to use heritage sites and collections to theme and inspire activities to support local initiatives and programmes or to engage new audiences. Cultural activities provide a fantastic way to bring people together, engage groups with no previous interest, and support wider initiatives such as wellbeing and skills for life and work. Cross sector partnerships also enable professionals and practitioners to learn from each other and share best practice which often lead to sustainable relationships and legacy elements.

Question 2:

If you run a centre or premises where cultural activities take place, please tell us about the premises that you run the cultural activities that it hosts. For example: What are the key things that support cultural activities to take place on your premises? What support has there been in place to grow cultural activities or events in your local area? What barriers have you faced in trying to host cultural activities?

Our PICs range from complex built structures, such as Edinburgh and Stirling Castles, to rural field monuments, such as hill forts, mottes, brochs, which have no or little infrastructure. All are open regularly to visitors, education groups, and communities, with events forming an additional layer of activity and engagement. Sites have their individual challenges (capacity, location, space, facilities, public transport links) but the programme of events is well-supported within HES, and is seen as a way of adding diversity of our offer and peak engagement points to the visitor season. Events bring in both a higher-than-average family audience and a more local audience to historic sites. Challenges on delivering an even fuller programme are primarily around capacity of teams to plan and take forward more than what they already do. When events are successful there is a strong case to run them again, with many of our most successful events becoming a regular part of the visitor season. This can limit the time available to plan new events in new locations.

To address this and other issues, HES recently concluded a major reorganisation to build a more regional focus within our structure. The aim is to have dedicated area teams to focus on engagement and interaction with communities. This has facilitated increased engagement with Community Councils, heritage societies, Friends groups, third sector groups and organisations. These strengthened relationships lead to community led events and activities being delivered at PICs, although legislative, financial, and conservation constraints can often lead to the expectations of community event organisers not being met. Our staff are experienced communicators and understand that barriers can be managed effectively through building positive relationships where there is a mutual understanding of the challenges and constraints faced by all parties when trying to provide cultural activities at historical monuments.

To ensure our staff reflect the diversity of Scotland communities, we are working to improve the diversity of our workforce in relation to a range of characteristics. We recognize this as a challenge and continuously work to overcome it. We have introduced a wide range of initiatives including the new Inclusive Recruitment Training and Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit as part of our commitment.

Volunteers play a key role in our cultural events. Due to the pandemic, the number of volunteers volunteering with us dropped significantly. We have invested in renewing our volunteer framework and finding innovative ways to attract diverse individuals. We are a partner in the [Make your Mark](#) campaign. We are connecting with our partners and community groups to expand the demographics of our volunteer base.

Question 3:

Please tell us about your views on the availability and variety of cultural activities and events in local communities, what barriers there are to growing cultural provision locally, and what needs to be in place to enable or to support a variety of local cultural activities or events.

In order to enable, facilitate, or support the development and/or delivery of a variety of local cultural activities or events HES is broadening our approach to co-creation and making it easier for communities to come to us with ideas and to discuss challenges, and to support their needs and access to knowledge and expertise. To achieve this, we recently launched a new national community engagement approach through our [Community Connections Programme](#). The programme is designed to promote and contribute to COVID-19 recovery and renewal work in key areas such as health and wellbeing, skills and volunteering, creativity, climate change, and destination regeneration.

As we develop our regional model, we are evolving our centralised teams' resources to support the area Visitor and Community Teams achieve increased collaboration and links with communities around the PICs. Within the regions there is a wide variety of cultural activities, programmes and festivals taking place, with duplication in some areas. In some locations these are taking place in isolation and not working in collaboration with other organisations or community groups. In order to support, and ensure these activities are sustainable, working more in collaboration would assist these activities and events. Networking events are key to opening the possibilities to support greater collaboration across sectors and communities.

From the perspective of learning and inclusion activity, one of the biggest challenges is being able to work flexibly and adapt to the different, and sometimes complex, needs of participants, which differ from area to area. Cross-sector collaboration, therefore, is crucial to address this, enabling staff to learn from and support each other, and importantly ensuring local knowledge can be incorporated. As a national organisation, when seeking to engage new or under-represented groups or deliver activity in new localities, we need to make sure we listen to the needs of the community and scope out what is happening to the group first to ensure what we can offer is able to support or add value to what's happening locally.

This work can be challenging, especially if project funding is time limited, or has targets focused on numbers, as it takes time to develop relationships and trial approaches, with the best projects often delivering a high-quality experience for a small number of participants. Engagement projects, however, working with specific groups can have much wider impact on the local community. They can help foster new partnerships and relationships; whilst end of project celebratory events or those showcasing creative work help give a voice to underrepresented groups with their wider community as they share in their success. As a result, more people are engaged with culture and heritage and the project has added value locally in terms of social capital.

For example, many young people in the Highlands were very isolated during the pandemic, and projects delivered as part of our *Heritage Remixed* programme helped them re-connect. Creative use of heritage as inspiration to help get young people back out into their local communities,

learning new skills, and having fun with their peers worked effectively and helped improve wellbeing. Partnering with local support services also made sure the projects contributed to wider social priorities and reached those with complex support needs and young carers. The young people relished the opportunity to get out of the house and meet people especially given the impact of the pandemic. They have also enjoyed trying something creative, often for the first time, and learning new skills which will benefit them in the future. A group from Elgin reflected that taking part helped them make new friends, gain confidence, and they enjoyed learning about a building in their community none of them had ever visited before.