



MAKING CONNECTIONS

AUTUMN 2026

VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

Vol 17

Fàilte air ais dhan Taigh Dubh! Welcome back to the Blackhouse!

After a pause of over 5 years, we are pleased to have restarted our volunteering programme at The Blackhouse, Arnol, on the Isle of Lewis this year.

Visitor Connectors Catriona and Peigi Ann have joined The Blackhouse team to help enhance the experience at this unique site, sharing its history as well as Hebridean and Gaelic culture with our visitors from around the world.

If you're planning a visit to Harris and Lewis, make sure you pop in at The Blackhouse, Arnol and say *Halò* to our Visitor Connector volunteers.

Blackhouse Visitor Connectors Catriona and Peigi Ann in the Visitor Centre in Arnol



Reflecting and looking forward

As we look back on a busy summer of volunteering across HES, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of our HES volunteers. It was a real pleasure to join our Volunteers' Week celebration in Holyrood Park this June and to meet volunteers from HES and fellow heritage organisations. I'm excited to see new volunteer programmes getting underway, including new remote volunteering opportunities with our Skills Investment Plan and Archives and Library teams.

With our first Volunteering Impact Report and Volunteer Development Framework in development, there is much to look forward to as we continue to grow and strengthen volunteering with HES together.

Director of External Relations & Partnerships Alison Turnbull
Image © Rob McDougall



Visitor Connector Olwen leading a textile activity at Stanley Mills
Image ©Julie Howden

Collaborating to Build the First HES Volunteer Development Framework

Community & Volunteer Development Manager Lee Haxton on HES's first framework to develop volunteering

HES has a strong track record of supporting a variety of on-site and remote volunteering opportunities across a number of sites and services in Scotland, but we want to do more.

Our current volunteering programme is the result of the commitment of a small number of dedicated staff members. The approach has been ad-hoc and lacked consistency. As the lead agency HES can do more to highlight and facilitate the benefits of volunteering across the heritage sector.

HES is currently working on our first Volunteer Development Framework, which will set out our vision and aspirations for volunteering in HES into the future. This will be accompanied by an Action Plan, providing the detailed proposals that will help to deliver that vision and aspiration.

Across the summer HES sent out surveys to three different stakeholder groups: our volunteers; our partners; and our staff. We asked for information and reflections about our current approach to

continued next page

Good to see you back

In addition to The Blackhouse, Arnol, we welcome volunteering programmes restarting after long pauses at Dryburgh and Jedburgh Abbeys.

We have also have debuted new site-based volunteering opportunities this year:

- Volunteer Gardeners at Aberdour Castle
- Visitor Connectors at Meigle Museum and Edzell Castle
- Volunteer Musicians at Arbroath Abbey

Visitor Connector Matt welcomes visitors to Craigmillar Castle



Continued from previous page

volunteering, what we do well and where we can improve. These surveys have been followed by a series of workshops, designed to go into more detail and develop themes and actions for the Framework.

As of September there have been three workshop sessions for volunteers and partners and one for HES colleagues. Emerging themes so far include:



Volunteers and staff at a Volunteers' Week event in Holyrood Park
Image © Rob McDougall

1. Those currently supporting volunteering opportunities have limited capacity
2. Volunteers must be at the centre of the Framework and associated actions
3. We should consider volunteering opportunities in different geographies and specialisms
4. We can improve communication among volunteers and between HES and volunteers
5. We need to do more to share the success and impact of volunteering, evidencing the benefits it brings
6. We need to build stronger partnerships across and outwith the sector

What are the next steps?

We are now going through a process of internal engagement, with the intention of having a draft Framework in place by the end of December 2026. There will be an opportunity to comment further on this draft, before a final document is produced by the end of March 2027.

Please keep an eye on your emails and our website, or reach out to your volunteer coordinator or the Volunteer Development team for more information. Input from you, our volunteers is crucial if we are going to get this right.

Your voice matters! Annual volunteering survey results included in Volunteering Impact Report 2026

Many thanks to those volunteers who completed the annual volunteering survey in May and have participated in workshop sessions for the Volunteer Development Framework in August and September. Your feedback and experience is so valuable in helping us to review our practice and move forward positively together.

The results of the annual volunteering survey have been analysed and included in our first ever Volunteering Impact Report, due for publication in October 2026. We will send the report to all volunteers via email and can make printed copies available on request to the Volunteer Development team: volunteering@hes.scot.

Volunteer Spotlight

Volunteer Gardener Heather shares her experience of volunteering at Aberdour Castle

Heather sitting on a bench in the walled garden at Aberdour Castle



How long have you been volunteering with HES?

I began in June 2026 as a Volunteer Gardener.

Where do you volunteer with HES?

I volunteer at Aberdour Castle and Gardens with the gardening team, and I sometimes join the team to help at other sites, like Inchcolm Island.

What does your role involve?

Each week can be different. My role involves general garden maintenance and keeping everything looking its best for the season, but there are also opportunities for incorporating some of my own interests and creativity.

Have you learned any new skills?

On a trip to Doune Castle we took part in an invasive species removal day. An ecologist showed us how to identify the species, and taught us the biodiversity implications and how to successfully eliminate these. I have

sharpened my horticultural knowledge and skills by volunteering alongside experienced gardeners, who can answer my questions. The orchard at Aberdour has been a great place to practice my pruning technique.

Have you found anything challenging during your volunteering?

The weather!

What is your most memorable moment?

Inchcolm is a beautiful location. On my first day there, I assisted one of the gardeners in transforming an old rowing boat into a small rockery, which is an area of interest for me. The visitors witnessed the progress and were complimentary about the transformation.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering?

I enjoy the novelty of the tasks, the changing of seasons, and the variety it brings.

Your volunteer benefits: free site visits and expense reimbursement

As a volunteer with HES we offer benefits as a small way of us saying thank you. In this edition of Making Connections, we are focusing on free site visits and expense reimbursement.

Free site visits

HES volunteers can visit our ticketed sites free of charge along with guests (either you and up to 3 other adults or you and one other adult plus up to 6 children). You will need to request the volunteer site pass from your volunteer coordinator or the digital code for our remote volunteers. To visit our busier sites or those with timed entry, you will need to book your ticket in advance. Speak to your volunteer coordinator to find out more.

Expense Reimbursement

We reimburse expenses incurred to volunteer, including travel costs (bus/train tickets or mileage rate). Speak to your volunteer coordinator and use the Expense Reimbursement Form to claim costs back. We are committed that no one should be out of pocket to volunteer, so please do speak to your volunteer coordinator and claim back your expenses.

Heritage Careers Week 2026

Skills Development Coordinator Jennifer Farquharson shares an opportunity to learn about pathways to heritage careers.

Heritage Careers Week is back for its third year! Monday to Friday, 5 to 9 October, activity will take place across Scotland to raise awareness of careers and skills in the heritage sector, tackle misconceptions about careers in heritage, and share knowledge and resources about developing skills, finding career and learning pathways, upcoming opportunities across Scotland, and much more.

There are plenty of public events to attend this year, including the Edinburgh Castle Careers Fair on Tuesday 6 October, and sessions on archive film in filmmaking as part of the Scottish Youth Film Festival in Ayrshire.

To book onto any activities, explore the range of schools activities taking place, or to get ideas for Heritage Careers Week 2027, you can visit the Heritage Careers Week Padlet and webpage.

Heritage Careers Week aims to engage the future workforce with the historic environment. In doing so, it not only delivers on Priority 2 of the Skills Investment Plan (SIP): attracting future talent and improving access, but will hopefully help towards addressing the skills gap across the sector.

Skills development and pathways into heritage careers can be key motivators for volunteering, and HES is committed to support our volunteers in developing skills. For more information on this event, contact skills@hes.scot or visit the website: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/about-us/jobs-and-volunteering/heritage-careers/heritage-careers-week/>



Event Volunteer Iain with participants at a heritage careers event at The Engine Shed



Gaelic Tour at Edinburgh Castle for Gaelic communicators and learners

The Gaelic team at HES are organising *Cuairt is Cadadaich aig a' Chaisteal*, a Gaelic tour of Edinburgh Castle followed by a *Cupa is Cabadaich* (cuppa and a chat). Come along to this imposing site on Castle Rock and learn about the Gaels who lived, worked and were imprisoned here. The event is free to attend but requires registration via HES' Eventbrite page. It will take place on Saturday 7th November from 11am-1:30pm. The tour will be fully in Gaelic and is intended for Gaelic speakers, communicators, and learners.

Scotland's Listed Places of Worship Fund

Grants Officer Laura Brown introduces a new HES Grant fund focused on places of worship, historic buildings that are often supported by volunteers in our communities in Scotland.

We are delighted to be making available up to £1million this financial year to places of worship across Scotland, to help support their repair and maintenance works. The Fund, which opens on 1 October 2026, is a pilot scheme HES has decided to introduce following the gap created by the cancellation of the UK-wide Places of Worship Scheme in March of this year.



Interior view of Paisley Abbey

The Fund is a VAT-equivalent scheme, which allows those operating Listed Places of Worship to apply for grant funding of up to 20% to recoup the VAT costs on eligible repair and maintenance works. For the pilot year, the new Fund will mimic the provisions of the old scheme closely in terms of ease of applying and the range of works that can be covered. Works that have been completed since the closure of the previous scheme can apply to the new Fund.

Funding for future years is not confirmed at present, and applications will be processed on a first come, first serve basis. Turnaround from full application submission to payment is currently estimated at six weeks - although we anticipate a large number of early applications which may slow down processing times.

HES recognises that Scotland's places of worship are often supported primarily or entirely by volunteers, and we know that our volunteers are often active in their communities. If Scotland's Listed Places of Worship Fund is of interest to you, you can find out more about this fund and all HES's Grants on our website: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/protect-and-care/grants/>

Welcome to our new volunteers

A warm welcome to volunteers who joined team HES since the last edition of Making Connections:

- Archives & Library Connectors Katherine, Rory, Sonia
- Event Volunteers Chris, Niamh, Renuka
- NCAP Digital Connectors Andrew, David, Ekaterina, Indigo, Raymond, Sebastian
- Skills Research Volunteers Aisha, Ellen, James, Veronica
- Visitor Connectors Caroline, Catriona, Chiranth, Clara, Ellie, Felicity, Garry, Jane, Jorge, Parisa, Peigi Ann, Tyler
- Volunteer Gardeners Dale, Elspeth, Heather

HES's External Relations & Partnerships Colleagues Have A Day to Make a Difference Together

Business Support Officer Ami Pattni shares her experience of employer supported volunteering.

Recently, I had the pleasure of taking part in HES's employer supported volunteering initiative, a Day to Make a Difference Together, at The Venchie Children and Young People's Project in Edinburgh, alongside colleagues from the External Relations and Partnerships Directorate.

We spent the day helping to tidy and refresh the playground, creating a more welcoming outdoor space for the children and young people who use it. With gardening tools in hand and plenty of enthusiasm, we got stuck into clearing overgrown areas, sharing a few laughs along the way and enjoying the chance to work together outside our usual roles. A special shout-out also goes to the weather, which treated us to perfect conditions throughout the day!

It was a truly rewarding experience. Seeing the transformation by the end of the day was incredibly satisfying, but what stayed with me most was the opportunity to support such a valuable community organisation. It was a reminder that even a small amount of time and effort can make a real difference. The day left us feeling inspired, full of enthusiasm and just a little weary, and we're already looking forward to organising more volunteering opportunities for our team in the future.

This volunteering experience has helped me to learn firsthand how volunteering is a fantastic way to connect with our communities, support great causes and make a positive impact together. I would highly recommend getting involved in volunteering through work or personal life to everyone who has the opportunity. Not only is it a chance to give something back, it's also a rewarding experience that leaves you with a real sense of achievement!

To learn more about the fantastic work of The Venchie Children and Young People's Project, visit their website: <https://venchie.org.uk/>



Ami (second from the right, top row) smiles with her colleagues in the newly cleaned playground at The Venchie Children and Young People's Project



Want to feature in the next issue?

We'd love to hear from you! To share your volunteering story have a chat with your volunteer coordinator or get in touch with the Volunteer Development Team via volunteering@hes.scot.

Follow Historic Environment Scotland on social media



Facebook: [@HistoricEnvScotland](https://www.facebook.com/HistoricEnvScotland)



Instagram: [@HistEnvScot](https://www.instagram.com/HistEnvScot)



Blog: <https://blog.historicenvironment.scot/>



VISITOR
EXPERIENCE



EVENTS



COMMUNITY
ARCHAEOLOGY



GARDENER



CLIMATE
ACTION



DIGITAL



MUSICIAN



FORUMS
& GROUPS



CONSERVATION



MICRO-
VOLUNTEERING



ARCHIVES



YOUTH
VOLUNTEERING

OGL

© Historic Environment Scotland 2026

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:
Historic Environment Scotland
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh EH9 1SH



HES VOLUNTEERING