



MAKING CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2026

VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

Vol 16

Save the Date for Volunteers' Week 2026



Volunteers' Week 2026 will take place 1 - 7 June. This is an opportunity for us to recognise and celebrate the contribution of our amazing volunteers. In 2026 we also commemorate 10 years of volunteering at HES sites.

The planning for this year's programme is underway, but please save the date for an event in Holyrood Park on the afternoon and evening of Friday 5 June, to feature activities, teams from across HES (and other organisations), volunteers from all over, food, and fun.

More details to follow, so look out for information coming to your email or via your volunteer coordinator soon.

Image: Volunteers and staff at a tour of the National Collection of Aerial Photography, Volunteers' Week 2025



Welcome to *Making Connections*

Fàilte gu A' Cruthachadh Ceanglaichean.

This is the first edition featuring the new format and name of our volunteer newsletter and we hope you enjoy the updated look and feel, and hearing about volunteering around HES.

2026 marks a momentous year for volunteering as we commemorate the UN International Volunteer Year and celebrate 10 years since the launch of our HES site-based volunteering pilot, which has grown into a thriving and continuously developing volunteering programme, thanks to our volunteers, staff, and communities.

Thank you for sharing your time, knowledge, and passion with us through volunteering with HES.

Image: Alison Turnbull, Director of HES External Relations & Partnerships Directorate



Making Time to Make a Difference: Employer Supported Volunteering

Community Development Officer Rosie Black shares reflections on a pilot of volunteering collaboration between HES and Sky.

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) is when employers actively enable and encourage their staff to volunteer their time and skills during the working day. Also referred to as corporate volunteering or workplace volunteering, ESV can be a powerful way to strengthen connections between employers, employees, and their local communities.

Image: Volunteers from Sky prepare to cut gorse with HES Assistant Ranger Johanna Peters

Designing Impactful ESV Experiences Together

Volunteer Scotland has been working with partners across the voluntary sector, including Historic Environment Scotland, to develop a National ESV Framework. The framework aims to help employers and employees get the most from their ESV programmes, while also providing guidance for host organisations on how to design sessions that meet their own aims and objectives. As part of this work, HES was paired with Sky's community volunteering team to trial a co-design approach for planning an ESV day at one of our properties.

The process began in November, when HES staff visited Sky's Dunfermline call centre. Erin Burke from the Make Your Mark campaign facilitated a co-design workshop, where HES colleagues introduced the Sky team to our work, the types of tasks they could take part in

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Share Your Feedback in the Annual Volunteer Engagement Survey

We will soon send out our annual HES volunteer engagement survey. This gives you an opportunity to share your volunteering experience with us and give us feedback on what's going well, what we can improve on, and ideas you have for how we can develop our volunteering offer.

The survey is completely anonymous and open to all HES registered volunteers, no matter how long you have been a volunteer or how frequently you share your time with us. Your feedback is so valuable, so please look out for the link and complete the survey when you receive it.

Image: Volunteer Musician Andrew at Stanley Mills



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Image: litter picking along Queen's Drive

during an ESV day and locations where this could take place.

Working in groups, Sky employees then designed their ideal volunteering day, taking into account the impact, practicality, and what would be most meaningful for them. The group voted on their preferred option, and a final plan was shaped collaboratively by Sky, HES, and Make Your Mark.

Despite taking place in February, it was a beautiful sunny day when the team from Sky met up with the Rangers in Holyrood Park for their ESV session, which they had called "Game of Thorns". The team tackled gorse management and litter picking, two essential tasks at this time of year that help protect the Park's landscape and wildlife.



Image: a Sky volunteer cutting gorse



Image: the Sky volunteers in Holyrood Park

Positive Impact and Great Feedback from a Great Day

Feedback for both the ESV day and the co-design process was overwhelmingly positive. Sky colleagues described the day as energising and rewarding, with every respondent reporting improved wellbeing, stronger team connections, and new skills gained. The co-design approach meant volunteers arrived fully prepared and understood the importance of the work. As one participant said, "Seeing those early ideas turn into real action gave a real sense of ownership and achievement."

ESV days are offered at a variety of HES sites throughout the year. If this is something you'd be interested in finding out more about, get in touch by emailing volunteering@hes.scot.

Welcome to our new volunteers!



We send a warm welcome to volunteers who have joined Team HES since the last newsletter:

NCAP Digital Connectors Cerys and Esme
Melrose Abbey Visitor Connector Tracy

And welcome back to Scrans Collection Connector Alison who has returned after a volunteering break.

Volunteer Spotlight: Keeping the Past in Tune

Volunteer Musician Scott shares his experience of playing music in a unique historic setting

How long have you been volunteering with HES?

I started volunteering with HES in June 2025.

Where do you volunteer with HES and what is your role?

I am a Volunteer Musician at Craigmillar Castle in Edinburgh.

What does that involve?

I play the Scottish smallpipes, a bellows blown bagpipe with a quieter sound. It's great for playing in indoor spaces like the castle great hall. I share traditional tunes to enhance the visitors' experience and perhaps even surprise them.

Have you learned any new skills?

I acquired a new set of smallpipes with a higher pitch that may be closer to the sound heard in tunes of the 16th & 17th centuries. There are some subtle differences between this and the Highland bagpipes, but a lot of practice has helped me to extend my repertoire.



Image: Scott with the smallpipes

What are your most memorable moments?

When a visitor has an emotional response to a tune that has a special meaning for them.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering?

Playing in an ancient hall with great acoustics is amazing and I don't need to pay a penny for the privilege! The local HES staff is so enthusiastic and I enjoy meeting visitors from such a wide range of countries and seeing them leave with a smile on their face. It is also important to me to be able to help raise the profile of Scottish smallpipes and the Scots Music Group where anyone can learn to play traditional music on a range of instruments.

Take Action for Nature at Caerlaverock Castle's BioBlitz

For one week each this April, May, and August, Caerlaverock Castle in Dumfriesshire will be hosting a BioBlitz event. This is an opportunity to take part in biodiversity surveys and find out about the resident flora and fauna in southwest Scotland.

You don't need any special knowledge or skills to take part and all ages and abilities are welcome to take part.

For event dates and to find out more, [visit our volunteering portal:](#)



Image: A native Elephant Hawk Moth

Welcoming Community & Volunteer Development Manager Lee Haxton



Image: Community & Volunteer Development Manager Lee Haxton

Having joined HES in October 2025, Lee shares his background and vision for communities and volunteering at HES.

I have spent my career working in the field of community development – covering consultation and engagement, empowerment, local democracy, community planning and community funding, including grants and participatory budgeting.

My first job was with a local community development trust in Midlothian, before moving into local authority work where I remained for the last 20 years, with the exception of a four year stint with the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

Coming in from another organisation and never worked in HES or the wider heritage sector before, I am still finding my feet and understanding the organisation, however it is clear that communities and volunteering can and do play a key role in our work.

My job (and that of my team – Development Officers Joanna Todd and Rosie Black) is to build on the good work that already takes place and seek to ensure a level of consistency in how we plan and deliver this work. We also want to support communities and volunteers to participate in decision-making in the historic environment, to whichever extent best suits their needs and interests.

I look forward to getting to know more about volunteering with HES and the heritage sector, and hope to meet some of you when I am next out and about at our sites.



Heritage Volunteering in Focus

In 2025, the Our Past, Our Future [National Strategy](#) team worked with Make Your Mark and Volunteer Scotland to produce a report into [heritage volunteering in Scotland](#).

Many thanks to HES volunteers who responded to the sector-wide survey, joining their voices with volunteers across Scotland. The report examines current pressures, highlights volunteers' dedication and underlines how volunteering in heritage strengthens community pride and resilience.

Scan the QR code to Read the report in full:



Image: Heritage volunteering in Scotland report

Dundonald Castle: History and Community in Harmony

Friends of Dundonald Castle Heritage Operations Manager Lauren Mitchell shares the essential role that volunteers play as part of the community at the HES partnership site.

Image: an aerial view of Dundonald Castle and Visitor Centre



At Dundonald Castle, volunteering is at the heart of everything we do. Friends of Dundonald Castle SCIO (FoDC) is an award-winning, community-led heritage charity caring for a 14th-century royal stronghold, and our volunteers help bring the site to life every day.

Whether welcoming visitors, sharing stories, giving tours, supporting events, or helping behind the scenes, our team plays a vital role in protecting and celebrating this remarkable place.

A place for everyone to be part of the community

There are many ways to get involved at Dundonald Castle. Some volunteers become tour guides, sharing the Castle's 3,500-year story with visitors from around the world. Others support our community café, offering a warm welcome, coffee, and conversation. Our education volunteers help deliver hands-on learning sessions for schools and families, while our weddings and events team helps create unforgettable moments for couples and guests.

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What's on the horizon for volunteering with HES?

We are constantly looking to improve and expand our volunteering offer at HES. Use the link or the QR code to [log in to our volunteering portal](#) to view and express your interest in all opportunities both live and full. Right now you could explore opportunities including:

- Visitor Connector at Balvenie Castle, Blackness Castle, Craigmillar Castle, Edzell Castle, and Elgin Cathedral
- Volunteer Musician at Craigmillar Castle, Duff House, and Edzell Castle
- Micro-volunteering at locations across Scotland

Look out for upcoming new remote volunteering opportunities with the Skills Investment Plan Team and Archives Team, a new Volunteer Gardener opportunity at Aberdour Castle, and more opportunities in the Scottish Borders in 2026.



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Image: FoDC Tour Guides ready for action!

Behind the scenes, volunteers assist with museum and archive work, and many support our growing programme of community groups and activities.

Dundonald Castle in the words of the volunteers

What makes Dundonald Castle special is the atmosphere our volunteers create. As one volunteer shared, "A friendly place to be. A warm welcome awaits all who enter. The FoDC has become a second home... a wonderful place to be a volunteer."

Another said, "I love volunteering at the Castle because of the sense of community I find there... I have made so many friends and it has helped me feel I belong."

For some, volunteering has been transformative. One new guide explained, "I've just started voluntary work as a castle guide and I love it. I'm learning so much, and

the staff and volunteers are so welcoming. It has helped my mental health and fulfilled a long-held desire to learn local history."

At Dundonald Castle we don't differentiate between staff and volunteers, we are one warm, supportive team who learn from each other every day. Whether someone joins us for a few hours a week or for special events, they become part of a friendly, enthusiastic community that cares deeply about heritage, people, and place.



Above: The FoDC team take part in Dementia friendly training

Below: The FoDC Education Team



Get involved at Dundonald Castle

If you live in Ayrshire and are looking for a meaningful way to connect with others, learn new skills, and be part of a vibrant community, Dundonald Castle offers a warm welcome to all.

Get in touch or pop in for a friendly chat at Dundonald Castle Visitor Centre, Winehouse Yett, Dundonald, South Ayrshire, KA2 9HD

www.dundonaldcastle.org.uk

01563 851489

community@dundonaldcastle.org.uk





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.

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EVENTS



COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY



GARDENER



CLIMATE ACTION



DIGITAL



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ARCHIVES



YOUTH VOLUNTEERING



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HES VOLUNTEERING



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