

# Heritage Sector Workforce Diversity Survey – Executive Summary

## What does the workforce in the heritage sector look like in 2024?

Auditing and monitoring workforce diversity is an important tool for inclusion. Auditing workforce diversity can highlight gaps in representation and help uncover why these gaps exist. It can also help prioritise resources towards actions to remove these barriers and provide direction for organisations to take specific, concrete actions.

Working to remove these barriers not only improves inclusivity and accessibility but also improves working conditions for all staff – as well as service users, visitors, and volunteers. Historic England has developed the pilot phase of a Heritage Sector Workforce Diversity Survey that benchmarks what the heritage sector currently looks like. The results and recommendations of this pilot phase provide insights into where resources need to be focused to make the sector more equitable, inclusive, and accessible.

You can find the results of this pilot phase in the [PDF survey report](#). A copy of this summary page is also available in PDF format for ease of downloading and sharing.

## Background to the Survey

The heritage sector has not been routinely or systematically audited for diversity, meaning it is challenging to analyse demographics and identify gaps in representation.

Historic England facilitated the development of the Heritage Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) toolkit in partnership with ClfA and Icon in 2019, but there has not yet been a systematic application of the methodology across the sector. The Heritage Sector Workforce Diversity Survey uses the LMI module on demographics as the basis for developing the questions and approaches to gather the necessary data on the sector.

In 2021 Historic England commissioned a research project to understand the diversity of the heritage sector workforce. Only 7 of the 40 heritage organisations who responded to our initial call already collected diversity data. We conducted a web survey to collect new data. Of the 62 completed responses, only a third were routinely collecting any diversity data, and only 22% shared it with us on the survey.

In 2024 we decided to pilot a different methodology where we invited individuals in the sector, rather than organisations, to complete the survey.

Historic England commissioned [Nexer](#) – a research, design, and development agency with experience in people-centred approaches – to develop and conduct the Survey over the summer of 2024. Nexer developed a survey that would allow participants to anonymously answer questions about themselves and a series of resources that helped people communicate about the importance of the Survey and understand the GDPR status of workforce surveys.

## What did the Heritage Sector Workforce Diversity Survey ask its participants?

The Survey asked questions about several aspects of an individual's identity, linked to the protected characteristics of the [Equality Act 2010](#) and using the [Office for National Statistics](#) categories. The Survey also looked at questions aiming to explore social mobility based on recommended wording from the [Social Mobility Commission](#).

The Survey did not ask respondents to identify their employer as Historic England felt this could compromise anonymity and lead to reluctance to complete the Survey. However, participants were asked to identify which area of the heritage sector they worked in. The Survey also asked about job roles and contract length, seeking to understand the intersection between demographics and careers in the sector.

You can find out more about each section of the Survey and why each section was important in the resource '[How Do We Communicate the Value and Importance of the Diversity Survey to Our Workforce?](#)'

## What were the headlines?

The Survey was open from 29 April 2024 to 28 June 2024. It was completed by 546 respondents, with an average dwell time of around 9 minutes, suggesting that participants took time to read and answer the questions carefully.

For this pilot phase, the Survey was primarily promoted through professional networks and initial posts on LinkedIn. This led to the participants being skewed to higher or lower managerial roles within the sector (58% of participants).

Some stand-out statistics highlighted real challenges for the heritage sector workforce:

- 90% of the respondents describe themselves as White, and of the 546 respondents, none of those in higher managerial positions describe their ethnicity as Black
- 67% of the sector have a full-time, permanent contract, but this drops to 50% of disabled people

- Almost 20% of the workforce identified themselves as disabled, and 25% identified themselves as neurodivergent
- Less than 10% of respondents had a parent or caregiver who worked a routine or semi-routine manual and service occupation, suggesting social mobility is low in the sector

More detailed statistics can be found in [Nexer's report](#). Researchers can also access the dataset – [please contact the Inclusive Heritage Team](#) for more information.

As this was a pilot approach, we recognise that there are biases in the data and that the results speak only to the sample we have collected, not necessarily the entire sector. For example, our survey showed that none of the respondents in higher managerial positions are Black. We know that there are very experienced Black people in higher managerial positions across the sector, albeit a low number, but this data still broadly highlights the underrepresentation.

We plan to run a similar survey in 2026, we are currently reviewing the methodology and will take into account any learnings from this pilot in future iterations.

## What were the recommendations?

The Nexer recommendations mainly involve the planning for future iterations of the Survey to ensure this benchmarking is followed up meaningfully and to assess the impact of work that Historic England and the wider heritage sector do in light of the findings.

The next iteration of the Survey should:

- Review recruitment and marketing strategies to ensure wider audience and take-up
- Reduce barriers to access by having offline versions of the Survey
- Change the timing to ensure the Survey does not clash with holidays or busy work periods
- Add in questions to develop further context, such as looking at the highest levels of education, and whether people who identify as disabled have told their employer

Recommendations based on the findings will be developed internally at Historic England by the Inclusive Heritage Team and in a reflective collaboration process with people across the heritage sector with specific and relevant lived experiences.

## What happens next?

Specific responses to the findings will be discussed in a series of roundtables commencing early in 2025. Each will invite participants with lived experience and expertise to inform the discussions and set action plans going forward.

These will be parallel to internal discussions and action plan setting within Historic England to target resources to ensure the sector is supported in work towards becoming more inclusive and accessible. All will take place online and be recorded, with the option for questions or discussion points before the session for those who cannot make it.

Initially, these roundtables will examine key aspects of the Survey findings in relation to the heritage sector workforce, namely:

- Race and ethnicity
- Disability
- Social Mobility

Dates and timings for these roundtables will be shared early in 2025. The results of these roundtables and discussions will be shared later in the year.

The next iteration of the Heritage Sector Workforce Diversity Survey will take place in 2026.