



Buckhaven Heritage Regeneration

Traditional Skills Audit – Adams Napier Partnership

September 2025



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA



Executive Summary

Since 2007, which coincided with early delivery of Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) projects and the publication of a major heritage skills report by the National Heritage Training Group (NHTG), construction industry reporting shows that there has been a significant decline in the number of people training and/or employed in construction trades that have relevance to the appropriate repair, maintenance and retrofit of pre-1919 buildings. This also coincided a period of lower repair and maintenance output on pre-1919 buildings which by 2023 may have led an estimated £5.12bn repair and maintenance deficit. However, more positively, over the last 10 to 20 years there is evidence of increased student numbers in heritage related courses, more people visiting historic sites, higher membership of conservation charities, steady volunteer participation and of greater enthusiasm for communities to own and/or care for local heritage assets.

The decline in employment and maintenance reported in industry data is reflected in feedback from skills questionnaires which highlighted issues with the availability of contractors and consultants, poor quality work and concerns relating to apprenticeship training. Some contractors, especially smaller firms, have become reluctant to employ apprentices due to recruitment difficulties, high employment costs and issues with early leavers. This seems to contrast with larger employers who generally have a more positive experience of the apprenticeship system currently in place. However, all tend to agree that positives steps should be taken to offer potential candidates some experience of construction and the workplace prior to commencing their apprenticeships.

There are opportunities in the Buckhaven Heritage Regeneration project to focus on some of the concerns raised. Firstly, there appears to be an appetite amongst contractors to be involved. Furthermore, the majority of responses from questionnaires expressed interest in attending supported educational and training events. Consequently, the Traditional Skills and Community Heritage Activity Plan have the potential to begin addressing many of the issues raised. This should focus on continuing to engage the local community with its heritage and encouraging appropriate repair and maintenance of its built assets; increasing the availability of conservation skills amongst Fife based contractors and consultants; and promoting construction and relevant trades as career choices and creating opportunities for those aspiring to enter the industry. The latter might be considered the highest priority and could help increase participation and employment in one of Scotland's most deprived areas. Creating clear and accessible pathways for participation for all ages and abilities is of paramount importance. Activities should be planned for pre-school and primary school age groups as well as for those at secondary school and should include promotion of careers in professions such as architecture, surveying and engineering. To encourage future participation in trade based apprenticeships and to reduce the number of early leavers, The Community Trade Hub in Buckhaven, who already has a good track record of increasing participation, together with Fife College and Fife Council could replicate a successfully delivered 'Craft Your Career' type pre-apprenticeship programme that the College and Council collaborated in with support from Historic Environment Scotland.

In summary, the four main activity themes should:

1. Increase community engagement with its built heritage.
2. Promote and encourage active appropriate repair and maintenance on pre-1919 buildings.
3. Increase the availability of skilled contractors and consultants locally to carry out appropriate repair, maintenance and energy efficiency improvements on pre-1919 buildings.
4. Engage with all age groups to promote heritage and construction, including a pathway of activities, including careers advice, demonstrations and tasters, and pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programmes aimed at increasing participation and reducing the number of apprentices who do not complete their training.