HARLOW CONSULTING

TRUSTED RESEARCH & INSIGHT

Heritage Building Skills Programme

Final evaluation report for Historic England – Appendix 1

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Appendix 1: About the evaluation and methodology used

Historic England commissioned Harlow Consulting to undertake a five-year mixed methods process and impact evaluation of the Heritage Building Skills Programme. This evaluation aims to provide valuable insights into the programme's impacts (short and longer-term) and effectiveness in achieving its goals, as well as offering an understanding of any unintended benefits or effects and evidence. The first two years of evaluation work focused on processes, the remaining three years focused on the HBS programme's achievements and impacts.

Originally, the evaluation was seen as being a key part of supporting the programme's potential wider roll-out. But due to the loss of funding, the evaluation is instead a key part of helping Historic England to share the learning from the programme internally and with the wider sector.

This final report presents key learnings, a summary of findings from process and impact evaluations and a selection of case studies. A research report carried out at programme inception, and four interim process and impact reports have also been produced, providing further information.

Due to the small number of stakeholders involved in the programme, opinions reported at an individual level are valuable. For this reason, individual responses are often cited throughout the report, for example, 'one trainee' or 'one host firm' felt that x.

We want to acknowledge the vital contribution of the HBS Programme team to the evaluation activity. We would also like to thank all those other Historic England team members, trainees, host firms and stakeholders who gave their time to complete surveys and contribute to interviews and case studies.

Note on language

There are different and sometimes interchangeable terms that can be used to talk about the types of heritage careers and skills that participants and their host firms undertake. The Heritage Building Skills Programme (HBS) generally uses 'heritage construction' and 'trades' when talking about the programme. However, we are conscious that in the case of the programme, some host firms and trainees may prefer or also use the following terms:

- Heritage Conservation
- Heritage Building Crafts
- Heritage Crafts

Data collection and analysis

Interviews and workshops

Interview topic guides were designed for both the process and impact evaluations and made relevant for each group. Between 2022 and 2025, ten interviews were undertaken with trainees, twenty with host firms, six with training providers and five with HAR site stakeholders. Interviews allowed for in depth collection of data on experiences, feedback and self-reported impacts, not possible with surveys and desk research.

Two workshops were undertaken with the Historic England team. A process workshop in 2022 and a final workshop to gather reflections and impacts of the programme in 2024. Analysis of interview and workshop data took a thematic approach, looking for key themes within the data. Thematic analysis follows the process below:

1. **Familiarisation with data:** All interview transcripts are re-read to get a good understanding of the content.
2. **Combine data**: All interview data was combined using the topic guide and key indicators as a structure.
3. **Generate initial themes**: Read through all combined data to highlight interesting or significant pieces of information.
4. **Theme development**: Review initial themes and identify themes that relate to the evaluation objectives and question(s).

Surveys

A range of surveys were designed to gather feedback from trainees, host firms and those involved in the Summer School. Surveys were sent to all participants using a census approach. These surveys and their current response rates as of December 2025 are detailed below:

- End of placement survey trainees (Harlow): 16 responses
- 6-month follow-up survey trainees: 12 responses
- End of placement survey host firms: 17 responses
- 6-month follow-up survey host firms: 3 responses
- Summer School surveys 2023 stakeholders (4), trainees pre (4), trainees post (5)
- Summer School surveys 2024 trainees pre (17), trainees post (15), stakeholders (5)

Descriptive analysis of survey data was undertaken in Excel. Further statistical analysis of the data was not possible due to the population size and scale of the programme.

Desk review of HBS programme data

To supplement primary data management information (MI), data from the HBS programme were reviewed as part of the evaluation. For example:

- Traditional buildings worked on
- Monthly trainee reports
- SRS advice to the sector
- Media and Digital Engagement figures
- Lessons Learned Log

This is used throughout the evaluation to help evidence whether impacts and outcomes have been achieved and understand the development and suitability of processes.

Case studies

Descriptive case studies were created using data from surveys, interviews, and MI data. These case studies were produced to illustrate impact and provide contextual information for the reader.

Challenges and limitations

One of the main challenges for this evaluation is incomplete data due to low engagement from trainees and host firms with data collection tools. This is despite efforts made by both the HBS programme team and the Harlow Consulting evaluation team in terms of engagement.

As the population of trainees and host firms is low, the evaluation would have benefited from receiving more survey responses. There was also a difficulty in reaching trainees and host firms to take part in interviews, with trainees being more difficult to engage. Attempts were made to contact trainees through different communication channels and over multiple years.

Data from Historic England is also incomplete due to the challenges in receiving returns from participants. Incompleteness also comes from disparities in permissions and consistency related to the collection of demographic data.

The counterfactual

At the beginning of the evaluation, there was the intention to explore the counterfactual, i.e. exploring what would have happened to participants if the programme had not happened. Although a control group was out of scope for the evaluation, there was an attempt to create something similar by contacting unsuccessful applicants to understand their progress in comparison to those who were selected.

Unfortunately, low numbers consented to be part of this process and responses to the questionnaires were low. There were six contacts made available for the comparator group, and there were five responses to the survey (one via email). Unfortunately, the number was too low to draw any conclusions. Some points of interest are given below.

- All respondents intend to enter the heritage sector.
- Three respondents are planning to undertake heritage construction training in the future.
- Three respondents applied to the HBS programme but were unsuccessful, and the remaining are considering applying.

For small-scale evaluations, such as this one, it is often difficult to successfully develop and measure a counterfactual as experimental methods are not appropriate for the scale of intervention.