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## Press release

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# Historic Scotland hits targets but could improve performance information

A report by the Auditor General into Historic Scotland has found that in general the body charged with conserving Scotland's buildings is achieving its targets and delivering the services it is supposed to.

"The overall picture is of an organisation which is achieving targets and delivering services that meet its objectives in broad terms," said the Auditor General for Scotland, Robert Black .

In 2002/03, out of nine performance targets, seven were met or exceeded and two were narrowly missed. These targets cover key aspects of Historic Scotland's performance on conserving buildings and promoting interest in them. Over the last seven years 62 out of 69 targets (90 per cent) have been met or exceeded.

However the report also finds that in recent years not all key areas of work have been covered by performance targets. Targets relating to the grant scheme were discontinued some three years ago and a target for visitor numbers was replaced by a target for "market share" compared with other visitor attractions. Audit Scotland recommends that HS consider reintroducing performance targets for these, and suggests more information could be provided on the costs and quality of its services.

The report notes Historic Scotland's success in increasing its revenue, largely from admission charges and retail sales. Over 10 years generated income has grown from £6 million to just over £19 million (220 per cent). The percentage of its budget derived from income has doubled, from 18 per cent in 1982/3 to 36 per cent in 2002/03.

"This marks a change in the balance between income and government grant," said Mr Black, "and demonstrates how increased income has played a disproportionately large part in supporting spending increases." Historic Scotland's budget went up from £40 million in 1993/94 to £53 million in 2002/03 and is planned to rise further over the next three years.

Despite handling some 25,000 listed building consent applications over a period of 10 years, as well as thousands of other types of applications, most cases are dealt with without issue. The report notes that decisions by Historic Scotland can be controversial and occasionally attract complaints about fairness and consistency. According to Historic Scotland, however, none has led to a successful application for judicial review or an unfavourable report by the ombudsman.

The Auditor General said: "It is important that Historic Scotland promotes wider understanding of its objectives and functions because there will continue to be a need for it to take decisions which are not universally popular, for example when weighing up the needs of conservation against those of development. The complexity of some of the decisions it has to make means that Historic Scotland needs to present its work in a way which is as transparent as possible."

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### Notes

1. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland.
2. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Executive and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor

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General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.

3. This report by Audit Scotland co-incides with a review by the Scottish Executive of Historic Scotland's structure and functions, which is also published today (Thursday). Our report complements the study by the Scottish Executive and has been taken into account by them in finalising their review.