

Our Bright Future and YouthLink Scotland: Green Employability in the youth work sector

A Research Review



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Introduction

[YouthLink Scotland](#) is working with [Our Bright Future](#) to support their policy and advocacy work in Scotland.

About Our Bright Future

Our Bright Future is an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts which brings together the youth and environmental sectors. This £33m programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, is formed of 31 projects across the UK. Each project is helping young people aged 11-24 gain vital skills and experience and improve their wellbeing. At the same time, they act as catalysts for delivering change for their local environment and community – contributing to a greener economy.

During youth-led research, young people across the UK decided on three key changes that would support young people and the environment:

Ask 1: More time spent learning in and about nature

Ask 2: Support to get into environmental jobs

Ask 3: Government, employers, businesses, schools and charities to pay more attention to the needs of young people and the environment

This piece of research will focus on Ask 2: support to get into environmental jobs.

With a joined-up approach, we believe that the youth work sector can play a vital role in addressing youth unemployment while tackling the climate crisis and recovering the UK's natural environment.

Scope and remit

This research report is intended for audiences interested in the impact of involving young people in green employability, and how this could be improved going forward, with a specific focus on the youth work sector in Scotland.

This piece of research will cover the following issues:

- What are the current green employability pathways and opportunities available for young people to access within youth work in Scotland?
- What are the barriers in accessing green employability for young people?
- What support is needed to create more accessible green jobs for young people?

This piece of research should support the youth work sector to:

- Identify where they can support young people into green jobs
- Identify new types of opportunities and solutions for young people to gain access into green jobs
- Identify good practice where some of these actions are already taking place
- Identify gaps in and opportunities for green employability pathways

Methodology

We have approached these tasks using a mix of methods:

- Reading/researching
 - A review of relevant literature and desktop research
 - Searching for relevant literature
 - Reviewing potential sources of green employability opportunities we know about within the youth work sector:
 - Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)
 - John Muir Trust
 - NatureScot
 - Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)
 - Skills Development Scotland
 - CEMVO
 - Keep Scotland Beautiful
 - Employability in Scotland
- Talking/conversation with:
 - Key stakeholders, organisations and individuals working in the green employability space and youth workers, which included:
 - Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)
 - John Muir Trust
 - NatureScot
 - Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)
 - North Ayrshire Youth Services
 - Renfrewshire Youth Services

Background

What do we mean by green employability?

Green jobs are defined by the International Labour Organisation as '[decent jobs that contribute to preserve or restore the environment](#)'. This doesn't just mean jobs in conservation or renewable energy, although these are both vital; there are many other industries which contribute to environmental preservation in other ways. If we need all sectors to work towards net-zero and climate action, then it follows that all jobs can and should be green jobs. The '[Growing Green Careers](#)' report makes the case for supporting more entry-level pathways into green jobs across sectors and embraces the idea that every job 'has to be a green job'.

You can read more about what a green job is and what skills young people can develop to make them more employable in the climate and environmental sector [here](#).

The just transition

A 'just transition' is the term that describes this need to move to '[a more sustainable economy in a way that's fair to everyone](#).' At the moment, lots of people's livelihoods are tied to polluting industries, such as oil and gas, aviation engineers, or factory workers making petrol and diesel vehicles. But if we want to tackle the effects of climate change, these polluting industries are going to have to change and shrink, impacting the lives of these communities and young people's future career choices. A just transition is about moving to a more environmentally sustainable economy without leaving these workers in polluting industries behind. Industries in transport, building and renewable energy, insulating homes and restoring nature and biodiversity are growing rapidly and with the right training and opportunities, workers in high polluting industries can play a part in them.

Published in December 2020, the [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan](#) sets out the government's plan to maximise the transition to net-zero for Scotland, ensuring that Scotland's workforce has the skills required to make the transition to net-zero a just transition, fair and inclusive to all.

Youth workers can and should be a part of supporting this just transition, encouraging young people into sustainable, high-quality jobs, and supporting them to gain transferable skills.

The green economy

The COVID-19 pandemic unfolded against a backdrop of climate breakdown and has already [cost tens of thousands of people their jobs in Scotland](#). Greater green job creation can generate thousands of good jobs across the country while setting us on the right path to meet our climate targets and deliver a just transition away from fossil fuels. Greenpeace has estimated that the UK government could help create [1.8 million jobs](#) by investing in a green economic recovery.

[Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#) recognises the critical importance of providing the current and future workforce with lifetime access to learning new skills, upskilling and retraining as part of plans to unlock Scotland's economic potential. The strategy sets out how public, private and third sector partnerships can work together to help make Scotland's workforce more agile and support employers to invest in emerging economic opportunities.

Learning for Sustainability: an entitlement for all learners

[Learning for Sustainability \(Lfs\)](#) is the umbrella term for sustainable development education, outdoor learning, global citizenship and social welfare. It is an approach to life and learning which

enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society. An effective whole school and community approach to LfS weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences.

LfS is an entitlement for all learners within Curriculum for Excellence. It is embedded within the General Teaching Council of Scotland Professional Standards for practitioners and permeates How good is our school? The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are central to Scotland's national vision and are at the heart of the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework.

By embedding LfS into all aspects of youth work practice, young people can be supported to engage more with the natural world and therefore the need to protect it. Through this holistic approach, young people are encouraged to view green jobs more broadly and consider a career path that makes a positive impact to their own wellbeing as well as the wider community's.

You can find out more about LfS and how this connects youth work practice [here](#).

Current green employability opportunities and pathways for young people

The research undertaken to identify opportunities and pathways for young people to access green jobs in Scotland is not an exhaustive list and aims to provide a high-level summary selection of what may be available.

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)

[DYW](#) plays a key part in the delivery of the Young Person's Guarantee. Local DYW initiatives are employer led and it's their priority to make it easier for employers to connect with young people in schools and colleges across Scotland.

Through DYW, employers can provide inspirational opportunities for young people to help them understand and develop the skills they need to succeed. [My Climate Path](#) is a COP26 education legacy initiative for Scotland's young people created by Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Glasgow, with DYW Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire and DYW West, supported by Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and funded by Scottish Government.

Initiatives include [Climate Heroes](#), where industry partners are paired with a school to showcase real-life circular and green examples, in addition to a range of community work experience, a youth climate council, activist courses and a sustainable fashion festival.

NatureScot

[NatureScot](#) are working with many partners including Skills Development Scotland to help to realise opportunities for new jobs presented by the transition to net zero. They want to make sure there are skills pathways for young people to enter the nature-based sector, for example through developing apprenticeship models to support young people into nature-based jobs. NatureScot have a variety of entry level roles such as Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships and Trainee positions found across Scotland. They include technical, scientific, specialist and support type roles. All posts give the opportunity to learn and develop new and transferable skills contributing to the delivery of their priority work. NatureScot supports a flexible approach to working and location (unless there is a specific locational base associated with the post). They are an inclusive employer keen to attract talent from across a wide spectrum of backgrounds and experience.

There are now lots of graduate schemes and apprenticeships available with many other organisations e.g. [SEPA](#), [Scottish Water](#) and many of the ecological and environmental consultancies e.g. Jacobs, WSP, AECOM.

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)

The [Green Jobs for Nature](#) is a new campaign to make careers geared towards restoring and replenishing our natural environment more visible and achievable for all those thinking about their future work. Whether a potential career changer or a young person thinking about what their future job might look like, CIEEM want to make it much easier to find out about the kinds of roles that exist, what they do, and how to get them.

The website will be full of information about types of roles and employers, education and training options, what employers are looking for, the good and the challenging bits about the industry, how to make your CV stand out and how issues such as equality, diversity and inclusion are being tackled.

They also have lots of [resources on the CIEEM website](#) relevant to the youth work sector. This includes [Where Can Ecology Take You](#): This leaflet details the variety of different sectors that utilise the skills of an ecologist, what those roles can involve, as well as key employers. In addition, [Rooting for a Career in Ecology or Environmental Management](#) is aimed at those at school or university to help them to decide whether a career in ecology or environmental management is for them. It contains practical advice on the employers, the work, qualifications and qualities needed to get a job, combined with career profiles written by people already working in the sector.

There is also guidance on [What to Study](#), [Apprenticeships](#) and [Work placed opportunities](#)

Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

[SDS](#) is the national skills body supporting people and businesses of Scotland. The aim of SDS is to support unemployed people to move towards and into work, with strands including skills development, research and insight and training. It supports the Youth Employment Strategy by delivering over 9,000 new opportunities across Scotland and also works with employers and employer groups on a national, sectoral, regional, local and individual basis, supporting them to recognise and articulate their current and future skills requirements.

The new [Green Jobs Workforce Academy](#), delivered by Skills Development Scotland, will help people take a greener approach to their careers, from accessing training and learning new skills, to finding a new green job. New roles are listed on the academy's website alongside information on the types of jobs emerging in sectors crucial to Scotland's transition to a net-zero economy, such as renewable energy, construction and transport. The Green Jobs Workforce Academy makes it easier for people from a broad range of backgrounds to consider how their skills and experience can be built upon to launch a green career.

Employability in Scotland: My World of Work

On the [My World of Work green careers page](#), you can:

- Explore the different types of green jobs
- See examples of some subjects you can take if you're interested in a green career
- Discover things you may not have known about green careers
- Find different routes in how to get a career which protects and supports our environment
- See organisations that are making an impact on green careers

Lantra Scotland

[Lantra Scotland](#) can help young people get the training, qualifications and skills they need to succeed in the land-based, aquaculture and environmental sector. Through a network of approved training providers, they also offer Lantra certified training courses in a wide range of areas. [Industry Champions](#) are all previous finalists from their learner of the year awards and act as positive role models for young people and influence issues affecting their own industry.

New to Nature – Groundwork

[New to Nature](#) will see young people aged 18-25 given new, full-time, temporary jobs in nature and landscape organisations across the UK, increasing diversity and enriching the sector. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of the celebrations to mark the Queen's platinum jubilee, the

programme will run until May 2024 and provide paid work placements for at least 70 young people from diverse backgrounds to undertake a range of environmental roles.

Nature Based Awards

There are a range of accessible nature-based awards that encourage awareness and responsibility for the environment as well as developing skills for green employability. Some of these include:

- [The Duke of Edinburgh \(DofE\)](#) provides young people with an opportunity to discover new interests and talents, develop essential skills for life and work, and is a recognised mark of achievement; respected by employers. Through a DofE programme young people have fun, make friends, improve their self-esteem and build confidence.
- [The John Muir Award](#) encourages people of all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. It promotes real world experiences and provides valuable recognition of achievement through a nationally recognised certificate. Working towards an Award can provide opportunities to solve problems, work as part of a team and build confidence in leadership – developing the attributes that can help people move towards positive destinations. Read more about [Employability and The John Muir Award](#).
- [RSPB Wild Challenge](#) is an awards scheme for schools, youth groups and families to encourage young people to connect with the natural world. There are a range of fun activities to choose from and bronze, silver and gold awards to achieve depending on how many you complete. The activities are divided into two sections: ‘Help Nature - making our gardens brilliant homes for nature and our outdoor spaces wonderfully wildlife-friendly!’ And ‘Experience Nature - getting up close and personal with wildlife and exploring the world of amazing nature right under our noses!’
- [The Junior Rangers Award](#) with Scottish Countryside Rangers Association is gained by taking part in a series of group activities designed to deliver a number of competencies of skills reflecting the skills and knowledge of those working in the Ranger (or associated) profession, taking the participants on a personal development journey. This outdoor learning programme is delivered by Countryside Rangers and other partners to provide opportunities for young people to develop practical environmental skills and, most importantly, in an enjoyable way, ensure they become responsible stewards of their planet. You can find out more about how to set up and run a successful programme and award [here](#).
- [Keep Scotland Beautiful Green Flag Award](#) recognises our best parks and green spaces across Scotland. It is awarded to parks and green spaces who can demonstrate excellent management and environmental standards.
 - They also have an Eco-Schools Scotland programme, the largest sustainable schools programme in the world with 19.5 million children, young people and educators engaged worldwide in 74 different countries. Completing a Green Flag Application is recognised by the Green Flag Award - a visible indication of a school's commitment to Learning for Sustainability and an internationally recognised accreditation for excellence in sustainable education.

Resources

There are a range of resources accessible to the youth work sector to support young people to develop ‘green skills’, engage with nature and encourage outdoor learning.

YouthLink Scotland have collated a central bank of resources, toolkits, activities and lesson plans for the youth work sector to access case studies highlighting best practice, sources of inspiration, including blogs and podcasts. You can [access them here](#).

Barriers for young people accessing green employability

There are many interconnecting barriers facing young people seeking careers in green employment as detailed below:

- **Financial**
 - The lack of a living wage when training or volunteering is one of the main barriers, particularly for those from low income households. It is young people who have the financial backing to undertake unpaid work experience or volunteering who tend to obtain a green job in the future.
 - Training, apprenticeships and voluntary schemes often do not provide funding to young people who require it.
 - A lack of sustainable, long term funding for organisations who run schemes and apprenticeships or work experience in the environmental sector means they are discontinued when the funding runs out and there is therefore no career progression for young people.
- **Qualifications and experience**
 - Young people from NEET backgrounds or low-income families are generally underqualified and must seek practical experience to help them enter green employability.
 - Many reported that young people see green jobs as for 'high achievers' only, and that there was a lot of competition.
 - Some organisations highlighted that in many cases, work experience is more important than qualifications, however this also creates barriers where young people do not have financial backing to undertake unpaid work experience or volunteer.
- **Understanding of what a green job is**
 - Young people and youth workers are often unfamiliar with the concept of what a green job is.
 - There is a narrow understanding of green employability and a common misconception that it must be related to either a position in agriculture, land-based labour or directly related to climate change.
 - Youth workers reported that the young people they work with feel as though a career in the green economy is 'someone else's problem', 'unattainable', 'abstract', 'niche' and 'seen as specialist'.
 - Youth workers expressed a desire to learn more and undertake training in green employability as they felt there were gaps in their knowledge of this topic.
 - Many young people and youth workers found it hard to obtain information about green employability pathways, opportunities or schemes to enter into the sector. There is no clear pathway or centralised information hub for young people considering a career in this field.
- **Recruitment and employment**
 - Many 'traditional green jobs' (mainly land based) listed are part time, seasonal or on short term contracts, leading to a lack of career progression or young people not applying to these jobs in the first place as they seek more reliable posts.

- Transport and access to work is also a barrier as many roles require a driving licence and public transport is often inaccessible, unreliable and infrequent in more rural areas.
- **Access and diversity**
 - There is a clear lack of diversity within the environmental sector in terms of age, socioeconomic and education background as well as cultural barriers.
 - The perception is that the sector is very white and middle class.
 - In 2018, Students Organising for Sustainability conducted in-depth research with the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, and The Equality Trust. Key findings from their research included [3.1% of environment professionals identify as minorities compared to 19.9% of all occupations.](#)

Support needed for young people to access green employability pathways

- **Long term and reliable funding**
 - This includes supporting young people into funded training or volunteer programmes and apprenticeships.
 - As well as training and support for youth workers to access to enhance their understanding and confidence in green employability pathways to enable them to give informed career advice.
- **Improved mapping**
 - Of skills required for a green economy.
 - Of the pathways and opportunities available to young people who want a career in green employment.
 - It was reported that having access to this information in one centralised place would be beneficial to the youth work sector as well as young people when seeking employment in this industry.
- **Visibility or role models**
 - Young people need to see and speak to others who have a career in green employment, who can offer advice and inspiration.
- **Recruitment and retention strategies**
 - An inclusive recruitment process, which may include a focus on life experiences of the young person rather than academic qualifications, and recognises the need for a diverse workforce.
 - Competitive entry level salaries.
 - Flexible working.
 - Clarity of career progression.
 - Organisations need to consider the level they expect a young person to be at – are they expecting too many qualifications? Is there potential for additional training?
 - Modern apprenticeship/employability teams should have specific targets to discuss if specific green jobs can be created/accessed. Or to lead discussion on how the current roles offered can be made more sustainable through youthwork.
- **Strong partnerships and collaboration**
 - This is critical to achieve the above points – we need joined up working across all sectors to share best practice and knowledge.
 - A joined-up strategy between educators (in formal and informal settings) and partners such as local authorities and the environmental sector could give young people and youth workers a better understanding of and more detailed focus on careers in the green employability sector going forward.

Conclusions

This report has analysed the need to establish long term and reliable funding to enable young people to access volunteer, training, work experience and apprenticeship schemes that will give them the opportunity to secure employment in the environmental sector. The evidence shows that a joined up and collaborative approach across sectors is key in giving youth work practitioners and young people a better understanding of green jobs and how to access a career in this industry. In addition to this, improved mapping of career pathways and skills required and inclusive recruitment strategies need to be considered.