



Urgent need to invest in young people's future and nature recovery

Context

As society begins to emerge from the Covid-19 health crisis, up to three million people are expected to be unemployed. The economic impact of Covid-19 has already proved to be especially challenging for young people; the number out of work is already the highest it has been since 2015¹. This includes a generation of **one million young people** who face a future of severely compromised life-time opportunities.

Amongst the enormous challenges brought by this pandemic, there is a strategic opportunity to **embed sustainable economic growth into economic recovery**. The Government's own advisor on climate change has stated that **investment in nature should be a priority**² - including offering a fast route to highly skilled employment opportunities, while improving people's lives and addressing the impacts of climate change.

Linking the ambitions to transition to a low carbon economy and to support youth employment, means that investment will not only generate thousands of jobs for young people, but also create new resources to help tackle the climate crisis.

Environmental projects can offer solutions to tackle both the youth unemployment crisis, as coronavirus pandemic takes its toll, and the nature crisis. New Government initiatives (such as Kickstart, aimed at young people at high risk of long-term unemployment and the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, creating jobs in nature recovery and conservation), are starting to give a focus on job creation through targeted financial support. These initiatives will broadly contribute to lessening the negative employment impacts of Covid-19 on young people, and Our Bright Future welcomes them – but **we urge the Government to increase its ambition**.

It is crucial to connect youth employment programmes such as Kickstart much more closely with environmental charities right across the UK. Most importantly, **a sustainable funding package** must be put in place to truly invest in young people's futures in the long term. And the approach must be built on fairness and equality, in order to enable a new generation of young people to find jobs and careers that benefit the environment, themselves and wider society.

The environment sector is ready to work with the Government to develop new opportunities for environmental job and training programmes

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Our Bright Future, an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts which brings together the youth and environmental sectors, has commissioned a report on support for young people to successfully pursue careers in the environmental sector.

The report, available in full on the Our Bright Future website³, found that training schemes with long-term funding are critical feeder routes for young people to get into employment. The following statistics are drawn from the findings in the report.

Impact of environmental projects on young people's confidence, skills and employability⁴

95% of trainees learnt new skills that will help with employability (London Wildlife Trust Keeping It Wild)

98% of participants felt more confident about moving into full time work (Uprising Environmental Leadership programme)

78% of participants improved their confidence (Venture Trust)

75% of participants increased their range of employability skills (Venture Trust)

Impact of environmental projects on young people's progression to employment⁵

92% of trainees either went onto employment in the conservation sector or further education (The Conservation Volunteers Natural Talent UK traineeship programme)

60% of participants moved into full-time employment (Uprising Environmental Leadership programme)

82% highly trained individuals are now employed in the sector (The National Lottery Heritage Fund Skills for the Future programme)

The majority of participants progressed into careers in the environment sector (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Tomorrow's Natural Leaders programme)

19 out of **21** participants in employment or further education (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Tomorrow's Natural Leaders programme)

3 months after completing training, **24** participants were in employment and **4** in further education (Fife Rural Skills Partnership programme)

¹ IPPR, Rescue and Recovery: COVID-19, jobs and income security, 2020. Accessed via: <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-08/rescue-and-recovery-august20.pdf>

² COVID-19 can be an historic turning point in tackling the global climate crisis

³ <https://ourbrightfuture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Support-for-young-people-to-work-in-the-environmental-sector-research-report-FINAL.pdf>

⁴ Figures taken from Our Bright Future's commissioned report Support for young people to work in the environmental sector: A research review, Simon Nash, 2020

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Greener economy is a stronger economy

In addressing the economic crisis caused by Covid-19, there is an urgent need to shift to a greener economy, that will protect and regenerate the environment, and better sustain the people who depend on it. There are growing gaps in skills and capacity in the environment sector, and a shortage of secure employment opportunities for young people, particularly for those from a disadvantaged background.

We urge the Government to raise its ambitions in supporting young people and nature recovery. We need to see:

- 1. Well-funded, sustainable long-term programmes that give jobs and training to young people within the environmental sector**
- 2. A stronger connection between youth employment programmes such as Kickstart with environmental charities across the UK**
- 3. Opportunities that are fully inclusive through a range of roles that enhance the value of nature to society**
- 4. Meaningful involvement of young people in the economic solutions to Covid-19 at a local and national level. This participation must include young people who are seldom heard and 'easy-to-ignore'**

A greener economy is a stronger economy. As we look to the future, it's crucial that we shift towards an economy that's designed to protect as well as regenerate the natural world, and to sustain our society which is so dependent on nature.

A well-funded, dynamic job and training programme would be an effective way to provide young people with the skills and experience they need to secure the jobs that will be a part of making this happen.

Our Bright Future is an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts which brings together the youth and environmental sectors. This five-year programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund is formed of 31 projects across the UK. Each project directly helps young people aged 11-24 to 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; whilst contributing to a greener economy.