



# OUR BRIGHT FUTURE

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

JUNE 2022

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Our Bright Future programme was an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It was a portfolio programme of 31 different projects running from 2016 to 2021. The programme brought together projects from the environmental and youth sectors, seeking to achieve shared outcomes for the environment and communities, as well as the youth and environmental policy landscapes. Projects shared the aim of empowering young people (aged 11-24) to lead future environmental change and ranged in scale from national to local.

Project activities included: involving young people in practical environmental conservation; engaging them in vocational training and work experience; supporting them to develop their own social action campaigns around environmental issues; and helping them to start their own sustainable enterprises.

The National Lottery Community Fund invested £33m to support the programme, which was governed by a consortium of eight organisations led by RSWT. All eight partners were expected to support the delivery of the programme by: linking projects together; providing specialist expertise/experience; being responsible for elements of the programme; and, in some cases, delivering projects.

This final evaluation report covers all six years of the programme, from its set up in 2016 to its close in 2021. Written by evaluators Economic Research Service Ltd (ERS) and Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP), this report seeks to celebrate the achievements of Our Bright Future and share the reflections of those involved as the programme draws to a close.



## Context and rationale

Over the duration of the programme, there have been significant changes to the programme's strategic context, with a growing focus on youth voice emerging in the environmental sector, particularly in relation to potential solutions to the climate emergency. COVID-19 also impacted on programme delivery, although some activities continued in some form, adopting social distancing measures and/or remote working practices. The challenges faced by young people that formed the rationale for Our Bright Future (i.e., wellbeing/anxiety, connectedness to nature, access to skills/employment) remain relevant, and are perhaps even more acutely felt in the post-pandemic context.

## Evaluation methodology

The programme evaluation aimed to identify, analyse and assess the collective impact of the 31 projects; whether it has achieved its long-term ambitions; and finally, to gather evidence of impacts and lessons learned in terms of what works and why. To do this, the evaluation draws on the following key sources:

- **Secondary data produced by project managers:** including quarterly and annual monitoring reports, project evaluation reports and case studies, as well as data collected by the programme team.
- **Primary data collection:** annual interviews with project managers, the programme team, youth representatives, internal and external programme stakeholders; case study project visits; a Participant Impacts survey; and a short survey of a sample of participants (known as the Outcomes Flower).



## Programme Outcomes

### Outcomes for young people

Our Bright Future has demonstrated that engaging young people in the environment and conservation has created benefits for young people. Across all evidence sources, participants were consistently found to be more confident, skilled, happier and able to find work through their participation in the programme. The key outcomes for young people were:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing;
- Increased self-esteem and self-confidence;
- New skills and knowledge;
- Increased employability and enhanced or influenced career aspirations.

### Outcomes for the environment and communities

There is evidence that through the cumulative environmental and conservation activities of projects, creating and enhancing habitats and improving community spaces, the programme has had a significant positive impact on the natural environment and communities. Project activities and the actions of participating young people led to the offsetting or reduction of CO2 emissions and reductions in waste being sent to landfill. Furthermore, projects created indirect benefits to the environment through influencing the attitudes and behaviours of both participants and communities.

### Outcomes for young people's pro-environmental and pro-nature attitudes and behaviours<sup>1</sup>

Project activities led to increased environmental awareness and knowledge and improved the attitudes and behaviours of participating young people towards the environment. This is likely to represent a key legacy of the programme, as these outcomes will continue to have beneficial environmental impacts through the actions of young people in future, in addition to the actions of those they potentially influence (friends, family etc.).

### Outcomes for policy and practice

There is evidence that Our Bright Future projects and the young people participating in them have had a direct influence on decision-makers and the way they valued young people as constituents. Through this, projects have influenced local decisions relating to the environment or youth policy.

<sup>1</sup>Richardson et al. (2020), ['The green care code'](#)

## Key Programme Learning

### Factors supporting outcomes for young people

Key success factors in achieving outcomes for young people included: providing supportive environments in which young people from different backgrounds can work together; connecting young people with peers and also role models; challenging young people and supporting them when needed; and providing variety in the types and location of activity. In addition, the programme demonstrated that the cross-fertilisation of activities works to achieve a variety of outcomes. For example, practical activities supported young people to improve their conservation skills but also brought a range of benefits in other areas such as employability and confidence.

### Factors supporting outcomes for policy and practice

At the programme-level, the Policy Function provided a clear focus for policy advocacy and influence, including establishing and maintaining contact with a large number of decision-makers and organisations relevant to the programme and its aims. The Policy Function facilitated the creation of three Policy Asks by young people involved in the programme, and their launch at a parliamentary event is another key output of the Policy Function. While the evidence of the Asks leading to project-level outcomes is limited, they provided a focus for programme-level influencing and there is some evidence that they may have influenced national discussion and decisions around policy related to young people and the environment.

### Partnership approach

The programme established an open and supportive culture. However, some felt partnership working was not truly achieved. The degree to which the programme was pre-prescribed perhaps limited the ability for the Steering Group/leaders to direct the programme and the opportunities for a partnership to develop. Although consultees felt that projects and the programme worked together effectively and efficiently, the portfolio design was considered to have limited the scope for collaboration on new ideas and seeking new opportunities. Projects did, however, report effective partnership working between projects, which added value to the outcomes for young people.

### Programme processes

Management and programme operations were highly praised for their efficient, clear communications and a flexible, open approach. The active engagement of the funder in groups proved valuable and efficient. The Share Learn Improve Function supported both formal and informal learning across the youth and environment sector. In person events supported more than learning, but contributed to project team motivation, peer support and development of a network and a sense of being part of a movement.

The programme worked hard at, and was clearly committed to, engaging young people in decision making. The Youth Forum, Evaluation Panel and Steering Group provided opportunities for 148<sup>2</sup> young people to build their skills and gain experiences that would support both their employability and ability to lead environmental change. Overall, the programme focussed on youth engagement at an impressive scale but may be best described as youth-informed rather than youth-led.

## Programme Legacy

Young people, communities and the environment will continue to benefit from Our Bright Future projects' learning, resources and activities. Our Bright Future's joint-sector approach has created a legacy in the youth and environmental sectors by influencing organisations' policy and practice. Young people intend to use the skills and experiences they have gained through participating in Our Bright Future to create a positive legacy for the environment.

---

<sup>2</sup> This number will continue to increase during 2022 as new members continue to join programme groups and more young people continue to be engaged through online events.

