

**NEW  
TO  
NATURE**



# **NEW TO NATURE**

## **INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT GUIDE**



# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide aims to bring together the learning generated from the recruitment phase of the New to Nature programme, informed by the experiences of more than 80 organisations who have recruited trainees through the programme. It aims to provide practical tips to environmental sector organisations (and others), on how they can design and implement recruitment practices to attract new and diverse talent to their organisations.

NB. The information provided in this guidance document is intended for general information purposes only and should not be taken as legal advice. You may wish to obtain your own legal advice and/or to consult with HR specialists when implementing changes to HR practices within your organisation.





# ABOUT NEW TO NATURE

**The New to Nature programme aims to attract young people from diverse backgrounds into the environmental sector. It reflects a desire within the sector to demonstrate that the environment matters to everyone.**

The programme provides work placements in a range of environmental roles, targeting young people (aged 18-25) who are:

- from ethnically diverse backgrounds
- disabled, and/or
- from economically disadvantaged backgrounds

Throughout this document the above will be referred to as 'priority groups'.



Made possible with  
**Heritage Fund**





# 10 STEPS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

New to Nature placement host organisations have been encouraged to try new methods in the recruitment of their New to Nature trainees, to help ensure that the opportunities are accessible to people from under-represented groups. Adopting these steps has resulted in 86% of New to Nature trainees recruited being from at least one of the programme's priority groups.

Feedback from placement host organisations suggests that applying a number of small changes throughout all stages of the recruitment process has contributed to success in recruiting trainees from diverse backgrounds.

Working with placement host organisations, we have identified 10 key steps that organisations can adopt to achieve a more inclusive recruitment process.





# 1. LAY THE FOUNDATIONS

**Organisations participating in New to Nature all demonstrated their organisational commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion before being selected to host work placements. Without this commitment, embedding alternative recruitment and employment practices is unlikely to result in meaningful or lasting change.**

Ensuring leadership buy-in, committing to staff training and education, and developing accountability measures (for example via goal setting and/or action planning) can help to create a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion within your organisation.

New to Nature has tested the extent to which **positive action** can be deployed at every stage of the recruitment process, allowing organisations to take specific actions to address under-representation (specific examples follow). A basic understanding of positive action (under the Equality Act 2010) will help give you confidence to work towards a more diverse workforce, without fear of appearing discriminatory.

## Key takeaways:

- Develop your inclusive recruitment processes within a wider organisational commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion
- Understand how positive action can be used to legitimately address under-representation

**'We were struggling to reach beyond the typical types of candidates who apply for our roles. Through New to Nature, we have found ways to reach more diverse job seekers and remove barriers that prevented certain candidates from applying.'**

The Bat Conservation Trust





## 2. UNDERSTAND YOUR STARTING POINT

**New to Nature was established to help address a known lack of diversity across the environmental sector.**

In order to address any diversity challenges in your own organisation, it is helpful to first understand its current position in terms of diversity and inclusion. Start by gathering demographic data on your current workforce, including protected characteristics (age, disability, gender, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation). This will enable you to identify any gaps or disparities in your workforce. Are certain groups under-represented, particularly in leadership or decision-making roles? Are there pay gaps that need to be addressed? Understanding these disparities is the first step towards rectifying them.

Gathering this data systematically can help you track trends and plan your response. You could consider participation in the [RACE report](#), which aims to increase accountability of environmental organisations and to track demographics across the sector.

Gather feedback from staff through surveys and open dialogue to gain their insights into their experiences and perspectives regarding diversity and inclusion in your organisation. Gather feedback from those engaging in current recruitment practices to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

### **Key takeaway:**

- Gather data and seek feedback from staff systematically to understand and monitor staff demographics





### 3. CONSIDER AN ENTRY LEVEL POSITION

**New to Nature operates on the premise that creating entry level roles provides opportunities for people with limited experience to enter into the sector – in turn, widening the pool of potential candidates and removing barriers.**

When adding to your staff team, consider whether an entry-level position, undertaken by a candidate with the requisite interests and motivations, and supported with supervision and training, could deliver the activities needed. This will provide opportunities for diversifying your workforce and bringing in new skills and perspectives.

#### **Key takeaway:**

- Consider the strategic importance of entry-level roles in your recruitment strategy. These positions can offer a pathway to help diversify your workforce





## 4. ENCOURAGE POTENTIAL APPLICANTS WITH YOUR JOB PACK

**A job pack is likely to be influential in helping a potential applicant to decide whether to apply for a job in your organisation. It can be a key tool in presenting your organisation as an exciting and accessible place to work.**

In New to Nature, a standardised job pack helped to ensure that key information about the employer organisation, its mission, and the benefits available to employees were clearly communicated to prospective applicants.

The New to Nature experience suggests that employers should consider the following when pulling together a job pack:

- **Sell your organisation:** communicate why people would want to work in your organisation, focusing on the mission, any benefits you offer, and the prospects of professional development and/or learning
- **Use accessible language:** avoid jargon or acronyms that may be difficult to understand for people that do not have an in-depth knowledge of your area of work
- **Keep minimum requirements realistic and proportionate:** particularly with regards to entry level roles – the more open you can be, the wider the pool of potential applicants and the fewer the barriers being put in place for applicants
- **Prioritise motivation over qualifications:** where the role allows, avoid the requirement for academic or technical qualifications, particularly where training can be provided to address any skills gaps. Degree level qualifications are less accessible to those from low-income backgrounds – only request these where there is a direct link to the duties to be undertaken.
- **Demonstrate your credentials and commitments:** for example, by including the Disability Confident logo, along with any other schemes your organisation has signed up to

This approach should minimise the risk of excluding candidates who may not have traditional credentials but possess the motivation and potential to excel.

### Key takeaway:

- A job pack will be an applicant's first window into your organisation. Ensure that it sells your organisations, uses inclusive language, and does not include unnecessary barriers to people applying.





## 5. USE DIRECT LANGUAGE AND REPRESENTATIVE IMAGERY

New to Nature placement hosts were encouraged to be explicit in the messaging that they wished to encourage applicants from under-represented groups. Feedback from successful applicants - particularly those with disabilities - suggests that this has had a major influence on their decision to apply for New to Nature roles.

New to Nature communications toolkits, informing outreach activity and vacancy promotion included imagery designed to address stereotypes and perceptions of the environmental sector. This included images of younger people, disabled people, and people from ethnically diverse backgrounds, as well as demonstrating a range of activities – not just practical conservation tasks – to help demonstrate the diversity of opportunity within the sector.

### Key takeaways:

- Be explicit in your intentions to attract interest in your vacancy from people from under-represented groups
- Think about how the images that you use in your job pack, website, or outreach activity can support or undermine your efforts to attract more diverse candidates





## 6. ADOPT A SIMPLE APPLICATION PROCESS

New to Nature adopted a standardised, simplified application process for all roles, focusing on just three key areas: skills and interests, motivations, and longer-term aspirations. Applicants were encouraged to submit this information in a format that suited them – in writing, by video or voice note, aiming to make the process more accessible for people with a range of skills and abilities.

Given all New to Nature designed to be 'entry level', the process sought to prioritise interests and motivations over experience and qualifications, opening up the opportunity to a wider pool of potential candidates. Feedback from applicants was very positive, suggesting that it was successful in removing barriers for some candidates.



**'Honestly, that was the most straightforward, transparent, and responsive job seeking and starting I'd ever experienced.'**

Trainee Cinder Adebayo,  
The Chelsea Physic Garden

To implement the learning from New to Nature, you may wish to consider the following in devising your application process:

- Prioritising skills, motivations and interests over experience and qualifications – particularly for entry level roles
- Considering whether gathering information regarding academic and technical qualifications of the applicant is relevant to your selection process – particularly where you intend to provide role-specific training
- Opting for a simple application process rather than a CV submission process, which tends to prioritise experience and qualifications over motivations and interests
- Provide flexibility in how the application process is submitted, catering for different skills and abilities, and helping to ensure that the process doesn't prejudice against disabled applicants

In whatever process you adopt, ensure that it is designed in a way that allows for fair and objective evaluation against your role specification.

### Key takeaways:

- Adopt an accessible application format that removes barriers for people of all abilities
- Design a process that will emphasise what's genuinely important in your shortlisting process. Prioritising skills and motivations, and de-emphasising experience and qualifications will widen your potential pool of applicants.



## 7. DEVELOP A PROMOTION AND OUTREACH STRATEGY

An effective promotion and outreach strategy can help to attract a diverse pool of candidates. New to Nature placement host organisations were encouraged to think about how and where the role would be advertised to attract interest from people from priority groups.

### Successful promotion channels included:

- Social Media: Instagram stories generated profile, whilst Facebook proved useful in connecting with relevant local community groups
- Offering open/recruitment drop-in days
- Online case studies
- Utilising community settings and events: for example, fliers and posters at youth and community centres, having a stand at local recruitment fairs
- Local radio
- Targeted recruitment platforms: For example [Evenbreak](#) for disabled candidates, or [Diversifying](#) - a career focused platform that showcases jobs to a diverse community

**Engaging with the local community via partnerships and outreach activities was identified as important in encouraging interest from priority groups. Partners included:**

- DWP/Jobcentre Plus (JCP): building strong relationships with local District offices proved important in helping JCP Work Coaches to articulate why their customers may wish to apply for roles
- Local Authority teams working with priority groups. e.g. care leaver networks, education teams
- Housing Associations, some of which have in-house employment teams supporting their residents
- Schools, colleges and universities
- Community organisations, including volunteer centres, youth clubs
- Specialist organisations, e.g. local user-led Disabled People's Organisations, local ex-forces groups

### When promoting your vacancy, consider the following to attract a more diverse range of candidates:

- Utilising targeted recruitment platforms focused on priority groups, where necessary in favour of more mainstream or environment-sector focused platforms (which have tended to attract those who are already in the sector)
- Reaching out to your local community to promote the opportunity, where possible collaborating with stakeholders – community organisations, educational institutions, and service providers (e.g. JCP)
- Use targeted social media activity aimed at raising awareness of the opportunity amongst priority groups

Implement a system to track the success of your outreach efforts. Monitor the sources of your candidate applications and assess which outreach channels are most effective in attracting diverse candidates.

### Key takeaways:

- Adopt promotion activities and channels that will reach more diverse candidates – this may require you to stop using traditional or mainstream recruitment platforms to maximise the impact of more targeted activity
- By developing partnerships, understanding your local community, and measuring the impact of your efforts, you can reach a diverse talent pool and create a recruitment process that welcomes candidates from all backgrounds

**'[The key change for us was] the targeted sharing of the role with key partners that work with [more diverse audiences worked to attract recruits] we were hoping to attract.'**  
Host Organisation



## 8. ENSURE YOUR SHORTLISTING PROCESS IS FAIR AND MINIMISES BIAS

Care was taken to ensure that the shortlisting processes adopted by New to Nature placement hosts were fair, minimised bias, and provided opportunities to deploy positive action.

Lessons you may wish to adopt in your own shortlisting process include:

- Using an objective assessment process using predetermined criteria to ensure consistency in evaluating candidates. Avoid relying solely on subjective judgments.
- Forming a shortlisting panel to reduce the impact of unconscious bias, wherever possible ensuring the panel represents diverse perspectives
- Design a shortlisting process that avoids overemphasising qualifications or experiences that may be unrelated to the position (e.g. not favouring degree-level candidates with qualifications not directly related to the role advertised)
- Gathering sufficient demographic data to support positive action (where appropriate). For example, gathering disability status to offer guaranteed interviews to disabled candidates meeting minimum role requirements as part of Disability Confidence commitments.

### Key takeaways:

- Use an objective assessment process that focuses only on candidate attributes that you've outlined in your person specification
- Form a shortlisting panel representing diverse perspective to minimise the impact of unconscious bias
- Utilise applicant demographic data to deploy positive action

**'[The New to Nature process] opened an opportunity for people with lower levels of technical skills to enter a very technical niche in the sector.'**

Host Organisation





## 9. SUPPORT ALL CANDIDATES TO SHINE AT INTERVIEW

New to Nature placement host organisations were encouraged to adopt interview techniques that address power dynamics in traditional interview settings. These processes were designed to help less experienced candidates to demonstrate their suitability, and to de-emphasise the element of 'performance' during the interview. The objective was to identify the candidate most suitable for the job, rather than the candidate who was most accomplished in an interview setting.

Ideas generated around a more accessible interview process included the following:

- Whenever possible, use a **diverse interview panel** to offer different perspectives and reduce the impact of unconscious bias
- Issue **clear communication to the applicant in advance of the interview**, to describe what to expect from the process. Include as much practical detail as possible (for example the format, duration, any expectations around preparation or attire) to reduce ambiguity and potential to cause anxiety.
- **Share interview topics in advance** with all shortlisted candidates, so there will be fewer surprises and less reliance on 'thinking on the spot' (unless this is important for the role being advertised)
- **Proactively inquire about and accommodate accessibility needs.** For example, provide a quiet space for candidates with sensory sensitivities, ensure wheelchair accessibility, or offer extra time for candidates with cognitive impairments.
- Foster an interview environment where candidates **feel comfortable** and can showcase their true abilities. Encourage open dialogue and ensure that candidates don't feel pressured.
- **Consider alternative interview formats** that encourage dialogue. For example, you may wish to consider the pros and cons of remote vs face-to-face interviews, undertake group interviews, run an open day, a 'walk and talk' or ask candidates to join you in undertaking practical activities (if relevant to the role).
- **Design interview questions** specifically relating to the role, rather than wider experiences, ensuring not to bias against those without qualifications or experience unless this is critical to your role

- Make it a **two-way conversation** – ensure that candidates can ascertain whether the organisation and role is right for them, by making time for questions.
- Wherever possible, **offer constructive feedback** to candidates after the interview, whether they are successful or not. This helps candidates understand areas for improvement and contributes to a positive experience.

### Key takeaways:

- Convene an interview panel that can offer diverse perspectives
- Help prepare all candidates for interview with helpful communication in advance
- Create an environment and adopt an interview format that will enable candidates to showcase their abilities

**We made the process as informal as possible via meet and greet with younger staff, room layout, and the dress code which was relaxed but professional. [We tried] to give a sense of what our working environment is like. It's really important to us how people are made to feel on the day. We focus a lot on engaging with people positively. We have adapted some of our template correspondence [for recruitment interviews] and will be using those moving forward.'**

New Forest National Park



# 10. SUPPORT THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE TO SUCCEED

Much effort has been made by New to Nature placement hosts to ensure that once successful candidates are selected, they are offered all the support they need to be successful in their placement.

Lessons from New to Nature that could be applied more widely include:

- Systematically inquire about **accessibility requirements** for all new starters. Don't assume that people have declared having a health condition or disability as part of the application process.
- Be prepared to **accommodate accessibility requirements** for new recruits. This may include physical accommodations, assistive technologies, flexible working arrangements, or additional support during the on-boarding process.
- Extend your commitment to accessibility beyond the recruitment phase. Ensure that your **induction and ongoing review processes are inclusive** and accommodating of diverse needs. Regularly assess and adjust these processes to meet the evolving requirements of your workforce.
- **Regularly review progress** with your new members of staff, encouraging open dialogue about aspirations, training needs, barriers or challenges

## Key takeaways:

- Complete your inclusive recruitment process by ensuring that any accessibility requirements of your new recruit are understood and accommodated
- Undertake an induction process and offer regular reviews to help ensure they settle into their new role

**'The process was really accessible for me, I especially appreciated being given various time and date choices for the interview and being given the questions in advance.'**

Trainee Hazel Irons,  
Wildscreen







## **HUGH:** ACCESS ALL AREAS TRAINEE AT EARTH TRUST

Despite the transferable skills Hugh gained from his chemistry degree, he had no prior education or experience that would allow him to gain an entry level career in the environmental conservation sector. New to Nature was able to provide this and not overlook his passion for the environment.

Hugh said: **“More people should definitely have the opportunity to participate in a program like this. It gives direction to people who are looking to join the environmental sector and gives them a way forward. It also allows people who have no background in conservation to switch careers and take skills and experience they have learnt elsewhere into this role.”**



## **STEPHANIE: AMBITIONS TO BRING MORE DIVERSE VOICES TO THE NATURE SECTOR**



After finishing her degree in Zoology in summer 2022, Stephanie, 23 and from London, was determined to find her way into a green job. Now working as a Volunteer Engagement Officer at the Bat Conservation Trust through New to Nature, Stephanie has ambitions to bring more diverse voices to the sector.

Stephanie said: “I’m a South Asian woman, and I am also an older sibling that cares for someone who’s younger. In our community, we are there to take care and look after each other, and being a secondary carer is important to me, so sometimes I have to stop what I want to do in life. I want to go and do things, and take opportunities but I’m not able to push myself, or I haven’t had the time and money, but now that it’s within the time frame of my work, I can!”



# FURTHER READING

We hope that you have found this guide useful. Other relevant tools and resources include the following:

The National Lottery Heritage Fund Racial equity in nature toolkit

[www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/good-practice-guidance/racial-equity-nature-toolkit](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/good-practice-guidance/racial-equity-nature-toolkit)

Disability Rights UK – Factsheets and Guides

[www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/benefits-information/factsheets](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/benefits-information/factsheets)

Mission Diverse – blog and news on latest training available

<https://www.missiondiverse.org/blog/>

RACE report

<https://www.race-report.uk/>

Government Guidance

[Government Equalities Office Guide to Positive Action](#)

## For information on reasonable adjustments:

- > Access information on [Access to Work](#) to help with funding towards any extra significant costs.
- > Access information on the [Equality and Human Rights Commission website](#).
- > Obtain advice on reasonable adjustments from the Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) at your local [Jobcentre Plus](#) office.

## About New to Nature

New to Nature offers new, full-time, temporary work placements in nature and landscape organisations across the UK, aiming to increase diversity and enrich the environmental sector.

Funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of the celebrations to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the King's Coronation, the programme will run until September 2024 and will provide paid work placements for at least 95 people, targeting young people from diverse backgrounds to undertake a range of environmental roles.

New to Nature is delivered through a partnership of Groundwork, The Prince's Trust, Disability Rights UK, and Mission Diverse. We are working closely with the Youth Environmental Service to ensure the programme acts as a stepping stone for a longer-term journey of change in the sector.

[www.groundwork.org.uk/new-to-nature-legacy](http://www.groundwork.org.uk/new-to-nature-legacy)

## About Groundwork

Groundwork is a federation of charities with a collective mission to take practical action to create a fair and green future in which people, places, and nature thrive. We support communities and businesses to build capacity and resilience in order to tackle hardship, achieve a just transition to net-zero and help nature recover in a way that reduces inequality and leads to healthier, happier lives for all.

[www.groundwork.org.uk](http://www.groundwork.org.uk)

