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New to Nature Community of Practice Resources

SUPPORTING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE TO SUCCEED (OCTOBER 2023)

A guide to supporting a diverse workforce to succeed in work, learning and measures summarised from placement organisations.

1.1 CONTEXT

[New to Nature](#) aims to provide life-changing experiences for people who might not normally have access to a career in the environmental sector. The programme has created 95 paid work placements in the natural environment sector, offering a 'foot on the ladder' for people from underrepresented groups, whilst generating learning to contribute to wider efforts to diversify the sector. New to Nature is 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 is delivered through a partnership of [Groundwork](#), [The Prince's Trust](#), [Disability Rights UK](#), [Mission Diverse](#) and the [Youth Environmental Service](#).

New to Nature aims to facilitate connections between New to Nature Placement Hosts, to share learning and good practice by facilitating a 'Community of Practice'. Primarily this occurs through quarterly thematic-focused discussions, drawing on case studies from within and outside of the programme, and encouraging shared reflection to inform future practice.

The October 2023 Community of Practice session aimed to identify learning from New to Nature around removing barriers for people from diverse backgrounds, and around the measures that organisations can implement to help ensure equity of opportunity. This paper summarises key content from the session.

1.2 CONTEXT: DIVERSITY IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR: FIND THE ENERGY (HYBRID CONSULTING ON BEHALF OF THE ESMEE FAIRBAIRN FOUNDATION)

Samina Zahir from Hybrid Consulting shared findings from the Find the Energy study, commissioned by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation to help address the lack of diversity in the environmental sector. Key messages included:

- **Change is overdue in the environmental sector.**
 - organisations know they should be implementing change, but don't fully appreciate the commitment required to make it happen.
 - A deficit approach isn't working – there is a need to recognise the benefits the positive impact that genuine inclusion can bring.
 - Diverse people feel excluded from the nature and environment sector.
- The report advocates for change in the following areas:
 - **Entry points for more diverse people to find work in the sector.**

Issues to be addressed:

- Limited engagement with non-Environment Sector organisations for community outreach
- High costs of education create barriers for less privileged candidates.
- Sector entry often relies on volunteering and feeling at ease in natural settings.
- Systemic racism in Environment Sector boards and senior leadership must be addressed.
- Narratives around environmentalism need to evolve, starting with community engagement that link people and nature.
- Diverse-led organisations see the mainstream Environment Sector as inflexible in engaging and recruiting diverse communities.
 - **Facilitating progression and the talent pipeline.** Issues include:
- Career support typically targets those in the early stages of their development, often not yet in the workforce.
- Investment and support predominantly concentrate on entry level stages - a significant gap exists in support for the career and skill development of management in the sector.
- Project-oriented culture in the Environment Sector makes long term recruitment and training challenging, often favouring those with existing project skills.

- **Removing barriers.** Issues include:
 - Smaller organisations felt they were 'far behind' and unsure where to start, often due to fear of engaging with uncertain or unknown sensitivities.
 - Diverse-led organisations: smaller, founder-led organisations building communities from the ground up were often the ones radically removing barriers, operating differently from larger, established organisations.

- **Accountability and Evaluation**
 - In the environmental sector, evaluation mainly focuses on assessing funded programmes, such as volunteer and audience diversity, engagement, and contributions, rather than the workforce.
 - Evaluation feedback on inclusivity isn't routinely collected to review leadership behaviours and accountability.
 - Organisations often fail to consider the impact on goals, strategies, business plans, resources, training, and workforce policy development, viewing evaluation as a funding requirement rather than a tool for organisational development.

2 NEW TO NATURE CASE STUDY: BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE FORCE SOMERSET WILDLIFE TRUST

Helun Jones shared experiences from the implementation of Somerset Wildlife Trust's Equity, Diversity & Inclusion plans. Key messages included:

- Organisational commitment, including the importance of leadership (deploying EDI champions across the organisation), training for all staff, and commitment to the Disability Confidence scheme.
- Revised recruitment practices, including accepting applications in a range of formats, providing comprehensive pre-interview guidance to candidates, checking on language (including for gender bias)
- Cultivating an inclusive culture, including Inclusion week, accessibility passport, communicating inclusively

- Making wildlife reserves more accessible, through accessibility audits, adding wheelchair friendly ramps, digital mapping, and information boards
- New to Nature experience has helped demonstrate and progress EDI commitments – particularly deploying positive action. Trainees progressing well and have fed back their improved confidence following the recruitment process.

3. OBSERVATIONS FROM NEW TO NATURE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND TRAINING

Mission Diverse: Race awareness, microaggressions, intersectionality

- Training sessions for New to Nature Placement Hosts have been well-attended, with delegates contributing to meaningful discussions and offering valuable insights.
- A recurring theme has been recognition from organisations of a significant diversity gap. Delegates have expressed a clear and palpable appetite for change, but the impact of the training on decision-makers is less clear.
- Delegates have attended multiple sessions, understanding the interconnected nature of the challenges, supplemented by the recent addition of Intersectionality training.
- Potential next steps could:
 - More leadership-focused EDI training
 - Support with EDI policy, practice, and procedural development and review
 - Collaborative working - partnerships between organisations participating in New to Nature, to learn from others to further their EDI efforts.

Disability Rights UK: Disability confidence

- Training delegates from New to Nature Placement Hosts have demonstrated strong commitment to disability inclusion, and a good understanding of the Equality Act 2010.
- For many people, the social model was a new concept. Helpful and illuminating. Understand of the ‘overcoming barriers’ approach is linked to having straightforward conversations about adjustments.
- Few participants had prior knowledge or experience of the Access to Work scheme.

- There was lots of interest in better understanding neurodiversity – with additional training sourced and delivered to New to Nature Placement Hosts.
- The Disability Confidence scheme provides a useful framework for organisations to progress their disability inclusion plans.
- Buy-in from senior managers is important - leadership intent and profile go a long way.
- Actively promote, celebrate and raise awareness of disability issues - pick some key events and/or ones especially meaningful to you and your staff in the disability calendar <https://abilitynet.org.uk/disability-and-accessibility-related-events-calendar>
- Consider workshops on specific topics such as how to be an ally and disability as an asset.

4. WHAT'S WORKING WELL AMONST NEW TO NATURE PLACEMENT HOSTS?

Group discussions between representatives of New to Nature Placement Host organisations generated the following feedback.

Disability

- Physical workplace adjustments - wheelchair accessibility, adjustable desks
- Software to make website more accessible.
- Flexible working – for neurodiversity and other conditions
- Using Access to Work to get further weekly support. Manager went to more specific training on neurodiversity (outside NTN) on workplace issues.

HR practices

- Importance of written policies and processes - consistency across recruitment and everyday practice
- Recruitment strategy reviewed – removing details for shortlisting, greater focus on attitude and passion, assessing for gender bias, challenging managers about the need for degree-level qualifications, sharing interview topics with candidates in advance.
- Utilising lived experience to inform onboarding processes.

Embedding an inclusive culture

- Reviewing and changing language and imagery - external and internal communications
- Trying to engage everyone in EDI - utilising EDI champions.
- Flexible working practices to accommodate a range of needs.
- Being brave and calling out non-EDI behaviour
- Celebrating cultural events

- EDI group, cross section of staff members, not led by Senior leaders.

5. HOW CAN NEW TO NATURE PLACEMENT HOSTS BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE?

Group discussions between representatives of New to Nature Placement Host organisations generated the following feedback.

- Reviewing and updating organisational policies and procedures to reflect best practice.
- Progressing through the Disability Confidence scheme – from guaranteed interviews to progressing to Level 2 or 3
- Expanding the EDI focused training to wider teams and/ or leaders
- Maintaining and building an inclusive culture as organisations grow
- Influencing senior leaders, including long term (financial?) commitments to deliver again EDI ambitions/ statements.
- Changing the demographics of Boards of Trustees (takes time and effort)
- Consulting with and engaging staff to embed and prioritise action on EDI.
- Ensuring progression and retention is embedded into the organisation, to allow continuity. Bringing in expertise from other sectors, progression from entry level
- Embedding changes in recruitment practices
- Utilising resources on neurodiversity
- Work towards [Force of Nature](#) pledges
 1. Committing to an action plan designed to make your organisation more inclusive and diverse
 2. Adopting recruitment practices that proactively seek to address a lack of diversity in the environmental sector- using the 10-point inclusive recruitment guide to review policies and practices
 3. Opening pathways for diverse talent by creating entry-level positions with prospects for career progression

6. FURTHER RESOURCES

WCL Route map towards greater ethnic diversity:

<https://www.wcl.org.uk/diversity-route-map.asp>

The RACE report

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

Esmee Fairbairn: Addressing the lack of diversity in the environment sector:
[Addressing the lack of diversity in the environment sector | Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](https://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk)
([esmeefairbairn.org.uk](https://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk))

New to Nature inclusive recruitment guide:
<https://www.groundwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NewtoNatureInclusiveRecruitmentGuide-1.pdf>

7. CONTACT

For more information, please contact the New to Nature team at Groundwork UK via
newtonature@groundwork.org.uk