

# WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE? PRACTICE GUIDE



The New to Nature programme was created to provide career opportunities in the nature sector for people from underrepresented groups. The programme was delivered between January 2023 and July 2024, providing 95 year-long, paid work placements.

## Overarching strength:

- **'Test and learn' approach:** The programme's test and learn approach allowed for ongoing adjustments and improvements, highlighted by the iterative development of the recruitment guidance. This flexible approach enabled the programme to respond effectively to challenges around the recruitment process and meet the specific needs of Trainees and Host Organisations.

## What made the difference for Trainees?

- **Targeted support:** The primary aim of the programme was to support people from underrepresented groups into employment within the nature sector. Unlike other initiatives that would seek to engage a wider range of people with lower-intensity support, New to Nature focused its resources on providing the Trainee cohort with targeted support to help them succeed. This gave Trainees a positive and valuable experience and created a cohort of well-prepared, passionate advocates who can meaningfully contribute to the sector.
- **12-month placement duration:** Stakeholders and Host Organisations reported that the 12-month placement provided considerable value for them and for the Trainees. Considering that comparable schemes are typically three to six months, the longer duration was felt to be particularly valuable. It provided Trainees with ample time to integrate into their roles and gain valuable experience during their placement.
- **Attractive conditions:** The fact that the placement was fully paid for, and allowed for flexible working hours while being a full-time role, meant that the programme was viable for a wide range of Trainees, e.g., those transitioning from other employment, or those with caring responsibilities.
- **Growth in sector skills:** The high-value skills that Trainees developed were a result of the varied roles and high-quality, accessible placements that were offered. This was in direct response to the 2021 Green Jobs Taskforce Report recommendations. The programme made a concerted effort to ensure that Trainees gained experience that would support their further progression within the nature sector. Host Organisations were selected in-part based on the roles they were able to offer. In addition, the continuing the professional development of Trainees was emphasised, a range of internal and external training courses offered.

- > **Wrap-around support:** New to Nature's holistic approach ensured that Trainees were supported throughout the programme. Host Organisations provided primary support, committing time to ensure that the onboarding process and supervision was appropriate to Trainees' needs. A coordinated peer network offered additional avenues for advice and support. In many cases, Employment Coaches provided further valuable and impartial support around development and post-placement transitions. Additionally, each Trainee had access to funding to address any barriers to work, such as help with travel costs, or buying equipment and clothing. The average budget utilised per Trainee was £250.
- > **Trainee cohorts:** By organising the programme into cohorts and encouraging Trainees to make connections within those cohorts fostered a feeling that they were part of something bigger. Given that most Trainees were from priority groups, this was crucial to ensure that they did not feel alone with any challenges they faced.



My role has been to support so many different members of staff, so I've had that opportunity to network internally and kind of discover and explore what roles are actually available within the immediate trust, but also going to networking events.

— Trainee



## What made the difference for Host Organisations?

- > **Low barrier of entry:** Stakeholders highlighted that the programme's straightforward, accessible model made it easy for Host Organisations to participate and provided the necessary support to ensure a positive experience for both employers and Trainees. The wage subsidy was a crucial element, making it financially viable for a broad range of organisations to take part.
- > **Inclusive recruitment:** While the inclusive recruitment process introduced through New to Nature required many Host Organisations to adapt their processes considerably, it was successful in bringing in individuals from diverse backgrounds who would not have been able to access the placements otherwise. Making interviews less formal and providing questions in advance were noted as key changes that made recruitment more inclusive, less stressful for Trainees and more insightful for Host Organisations.
- > **Centralised recruitment:** In addition to running an effective national marketing campaign, Groundwork UK's support in processing applications was valued, as this streamlined the process. Undertaking recruitment can be a considerable burden and resource-intensive pressure on organisations, particularly smaller NGOs within the nature sector. Groundwork UK was able to alleviate pressures on organisations through the centralised recruitment process. Being positioned as an intermediary between Trainees and Host Organisations, Groundwork UK was also able to ensure that the selection process was as unbiased as possible, for example by anonymising applications before sending them to the Host Organisations.

More detail on the Recruitment process can be found in the [Recruitment Learning paper](#).

- **12-month placement duration:** The extended placement duration reduced pressures on Host Organisations. It provided more space and time to embed Trainees to ensure a meaningful experience all. In turn, it enabled Host Organisations to better balance the responsibilities and pressures of their respective organisations with the Trainee's needs. As Trainees spent more time in their roles, they became more comfortable and were able to deliver greater value to their organisations, e.g. by independently leading projects.
- **Scale and diversity:** The scale of the programme was considered a strength by all stakeholders. The network was comprised of up to 82 Host Organisations made up of diverse missions, of different sizes and knowledge bases. This wide range of organisations was committed to the pilot's aims which allowed for and facilitated an environment that fostered learning and collaboration across the network.



## What made the difference to the sector?

- **Fostering a culture of collaboration:** Many Host Organisations appreciated the opportunity to collaborate in designing recruitment processes, allowing for the exchange of best practice ideas and knowledge. Regular Communities of Practice sessions were praised and seen as useful for sharing experiences, particularly around managing Trainees with different needs. For example, much focus and discussions centred on supporting neurodiverse and disabled staff. The mix of Host Organisations also meant that smaller organisations were able to benefit from contact with larger organisations that had more developed HR departments and could provide additional guidance for example around recruitment.
  - **Sharing learning:** The programme was able to share tried and tested recruitment guidance and templates to a wider sector that was motivated to take steps towards more inclusivity and diversity but was unsure how.
- The programme provided a model framework that other organisations can now use for recruiting and supporting individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those facing multiple barriers to entering the sector. The recruitment guidance will remain available to access on the [Groundwork website](#) and has also been published by the [National Lottery Heritage Fund](#).
- **Coordinated campaign:** The programme publicised its successes through a coordinated marketing campaign that accompanied programme delivery. This generated sector-wide interest highlighted by the more than 90 additional organisations making pledges through the Force of Nature campaign. With organisations committing to creating more accessible career opportunities for young people, particularly those from underrepresented groups.