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# NEW TO NATURE:

## LEGACY REPORT

DECEMBER 2025

**WAVEHILL:**

## **SOCIAL & ECONOMIC RESEARCH**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

New to Nature was a pilot programme designed to provide career opportunities in the nature sector for people from underrepresented groups (priority groups) specifically young people (aged 18-25) who were:

- > Ethnically diverse
- > Disabled and/or
- > Economically disadvantaged.

The programme was delivered between January 2023 and July 2024 and provided 95, year-long, paid work placements<sup>1</sup> to trainees across three cohorts. New to Nature aimed to contribute to wider efforts undertaken across the sector to create a more diverse and inclusive nature workforce and build the capacity of the sector.

New to Nature was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (The Heritage Fund) in commemoration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the King's Coronation. The programme was delivered through a partnership of Groundwork UK, The Youth Environmental Service (YES), The Prince's Trust (now The King's Trust), Disability Rights UK, and Mission Diverse.

Host Organisations engaged in the programme also received a range of support and training from Groundwork UK and partners throughout the duration of the programme.

This Legacy Report explores the longer-term impacts of the programme on Trainees, Host Organisations, and the wider sector, drawing on follow-up surveys and workshops conducted one year after placements ended.

<sup>1</sup> Please note that there were 95 roles but 98 trainees. Two Trainees left the programme part way through, and replacements were found for their roles. There was also one job share arrangement.



## 1.1 The Evaluation

Groundwork UK commissioned Wavehill to undertake the evaluation of New to Nature in December 2022. The evaluation has sought to explore and review:

- The impact and benefit the programme has delivered for the Trainees.
- The effectiveness of New to Nature in supporting the nature sector to attract, employ and retain staff from diverse backgrounds.
- To understand what further support and development may be required by the sector in order to maintain momentum and grow the wider impact of the programme. Within this, considering what has worked well in the programme and where additional support and information sharing may be required.

As a pilot programme, this evaluation has an emphasis on learning that could inform future provision.

Within this evaluation, a series of outputs have been created. This includes the **Recruitment Learning paper** and a **12-month interim impact report** and summative evaluation process and impact reports, covering all three Trainee cohorts in September 2024. This Legacy Report is the final report within this evaluation.

## 1.2 Methodology

To inform this Legacy Report, a range of fieldwork and desk-based research was undertaken between January 2025 and September 2025.

- A final survey of Trainees (28 responses), disseminated in February 2025, 8 months to 1 year after they completed their placement.
- A final survey of Host Organisations (37 responses), disseminated in May 2025 (between 1 year and 8 months after their Trainees' completed their placement).
- A series of reflective workshops with Host Organisation staff (12 attendees) held between August and September 2025.



## 2. LEGACY FOR TRAINEES

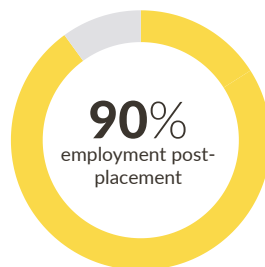
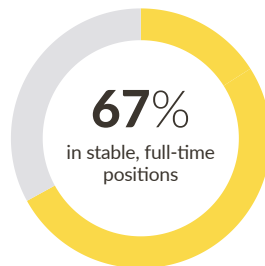
The evaluation found that New to Nature successfully supported young people from priority groups not only into work but also helped them remain in stable roles within the environmental sector.

### 2.1 Employment in the Nature Sector

#### 2.1.1 Employment Outcomes

The Trainee survey findings demonstrate that New to Nature created **clear pathways into employment** for many participants.

- > A large proportion of Trainees moved directly into jobs with their Host Organisation once the placement ended. Where Trainees remained with their Host Organisation, the majority (67%, or 10 out of 15) were in stable, full-time positions rather than short-term contracts.
- > Across all interviews Trainees, almost 90% (19 out of 22) were in employment post-placement. Of those employed, the vast majority (89%, or 17 out of 19) secured roles within the environmental sector. **This demonstrates the programme's success in helping Trainees not only enter but also stay engaged in careers made more accessible by the programme.**



- > Among all employed Trainees, **most were in full-time positions (68%, or 13 out of 19), reflecting a degree of stability beyond the initial placement.** A smaller percentage were in temporary full-time (11%, 2 out of 19) or part-time roles (21%, 4 out of 19).



#### 2.1.2 Career Progression

New to Nature played a **clear role in enabling career progression** once Trainees secured subsequent work.

- > Trainees reported various positive changes in their current employment, including securing **promotions (9)**, receiving a **pay rise (10)**, having **more responsibility (11)**, and gaining **enhanced job security (7)**.
- > Importantly, almost all Trainees who experienced these forms of progression (23 out of 24) felt that New to Nature contributed to them. **These outcomes demonstrate that the programme has not only supported Trainees to secure employment but also positioned them for longer-term career development and stability within the sector.**

'There is no way I'd have this job I do now without new to nature breaking the barrier to entry. I now earn over £10k more a year than I did before I applied to New to Nature. It's been life changing.'

- Trainee

‘The New to Nature programme has been great for me, I feel that it has really cemented my career in the environmental sector and given me opportunities that I may not have been able to access if not. I feel very grateful for it and will always be thankful that it gave me a great start to working in the environmental sector.’

- Trainee

- Trainees reported increased confidence in their ability to find a job in their chosen field, progress within it, and remain in it for a reasonable period of time. Trainees felt most assured about their ability to stay in a role once secured, with approximately three-quarters expressing confidence in keeping a job for a reasonable length of time.



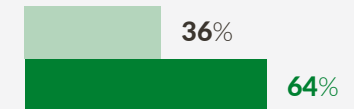
Figure 2.1: Trainee views on future career progression

### Finding a future job in the field you want to be in

Before placement

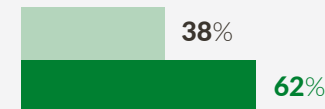


1 year after placement

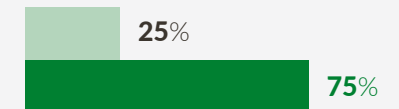


### Being able to progress in that job

Before placement

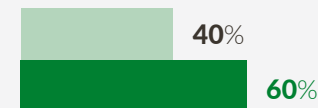


1 year after placement

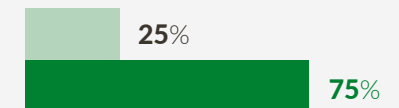


### Keeping that job for a reasonable period of time

Before placement



1 year after placement



● Not Confident ● Confident

Base: Trainee Engagement Survey (N=58) and Trainee Legacy Survey (N=28).

- > It is important to note that while these findings provide a positive indication of New to Nature's impact on Trainees' confidence and self-esteem, they also represent a decline compared with confidence levels at the end of placements.
- > Trainees linked facing challenges in securing ongoing employment to the **limited availability of suitable roles across the sector**. The wider uncertainty in the UK job market in 2025, where recruitment activity has reduced, was seen as compounding this challenge.

'During the programme, I felt positive about my career, but since it ended, I am finding it difficult to find a job in the sector.'

- Trainee

### 2.1.3 Employability and Skill Development

Reflecting on the comprehensive support and experience gained, the majority of Trainees (80%, 16 out of 20) reported that the programme helped them secure their current job to a great extent.

- > Trainees stressed the programme's direct role in helping them **demonstrate their abilities to prospective employers**, which built credibility and visibility within the sector. Many felt that without the programme, they would not have been competitive for equivalent roles that typically demand advanced degrees or several years of prior experience. The programme created a rare entry point, enabling them to build experience on the job.

'I am sure I would never have got this current job if I hadn't come to them through the placement and been able to demonstrate and grow my skills in that sort of supported way.'

- Trainee

- > Through practical experience and support, Trainees developed competencies including **organisational skills, project management, conservation skills, and teamwork**.
- > **The Breaking Barriers Fund provided a flexible budget of £250 on average, was highlighted as invaluable.** Trainees used it for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and travel expenses. Crucially, the fund enabled access to essential qualifications like driving lessons. This directly addresses a well-known barrier to sector entry, especially for rural roles. One Trainee noted that the fund allowed them to access workplaces that would otherwise have been inaccessible.

## 2.1.4 Perceptions of the Nature Sector

- > A year after completing the programme, all Trainee respondents expressed interest in pursuing a career in the sector, with the vast majority (24/28) stating that they were **very interested**.
- > The programme successfully increased Trainees' knowledge and awareness, with 92% reporting feeling quite or very well informed about the sector and its career opportunities. **This was attributed to New to Nature 'opening their eyes' to the breadth of opportunities beyond frontline conservation (such as digital media and communications).**
- > Perceptions of the sector's accessibility remained mixed, indicating that structural barriers persist. In the final legacy survey, **no Trainees reported the nature sector was 'Very accessible'** for any of the underrepresented groups (young people, ethnically diverse backgrounds, working-class backgrounds, or people with disabilities). In some instances, Trainees perceived the sector as less accessible than they had at the start of their placements.

Table 2.1: To what extent do you feel that careers in the nature sector are accessible to [underrepresented group]? All survey responses

Underrepresented group	Survey interval	Not accessible	Somewhat accessible	Very accessible
Young people	Before placement	5%	91%	5%
	1 year after placement	43%	57%	0%
People from an ethnically diverse background	Before placement	50%	37%	13%
	1 year after placement	46%	54%	0%
People from working-class backgrounds	Before placement	52%	40%	8%
	1 year after placement	61%	39%	0%
People with disabilities and long-term health conditions	Before placement	69%	29%	2%
	1 year after placement	54%	46%	0%

Base: Trainee Engagement Survey (N=58) and Trainee Legacy Survey (N=28). Please note that this table does not include 'Don't know' responses.

- Key barriers identified, particularly affecting working-class individuals, included:
  - The expectation of extensive unpaid work experience. One Trainee stated that NGOs asking for 16 hours of volunteering a week is a privilege the working class do not have.
  - The requirement for driving licences or additional certifications.
  - Unequal access to further and higher education.
  - Limited roles for young people, as many are occupied by those mid-career.
  - Lack of visible role models from ethnically diverse or working-class backgrounds.

Despite mixed views on the wider sector's accessibility, Trainees gave overwhelming support for New to Nature itself, praising its clear commitment to advancing accessibility, inclusivity, and diversity.

'It was great to be part of a collective working to diversify the environmental sector but if I hadn't been part of this collective most of the people I [am] interacting with would not be diverse.'

– Trainee



## 2.2 Personal Impact

### 2.2.1 Improved Confidence and Wellbeing

The programme delivered a **positive personal impact** on Trainees.

- Trainees' average scores on Life Satisfaction, Life Worthwhile, Happiness, and Anxiety all improved by the end of their placements. **Trainees' wellbeing, on average, improved towards the UK national average ratings.**



Figure 2.2: Average pre- and post-placement ONS Wellbeing Measure scores and UK average

#### Life Satisfaction



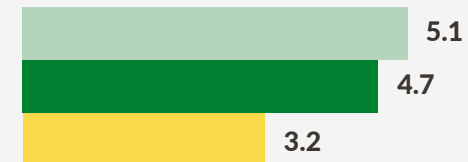
#### Life Worthwhile



#### Happiness



#### Anxiety



- Before placement
- 1 Year after placement
- UK average ratings for YE March 2023

Base: Trainee Engagement Survey (N=58) and Trainee Legacy Survey (N=28).

- **Trainees reported feeling happier, more optimistic about their futures, and more confident in their value within the workplace.** For some, working outdoors and contributing to causes they cared about had a direct positive impact on wellbeing and overall life satisfaction.

'I feel much happier with my life in general. I am less stressed, despite having more responsibility in my job, and truly enjoy what I am doing. Getting outdoors through my job has been a huge benefit for me and being amongst colleagues/volunteers/the general public who share my interests.'

- Trainee

- Securing and sustaining employment still negatively affected the wellbeing of some Trainees, particularly those struggling with the **'stress of short fixed-term contracts'**.



## 2.2.2 Community and Peer Support

A key aspect of the programme's value was the **sense of community** it fostered.

- Trainees frequently reported that the programme 'gave them a community'. Meeting others from diverse backgrounds navigating similar challenges helped normalise their experiences and provided encouragement.
- The Peer Mentoring Scheme facilitated by the Youth Environmental Service (YES) continued to support Trainees post-programme. These sessions helped Trainees discuss workplace challenges, focus on topics like **active listening and managing stress**, and prioritise their own wellbeing. This extended the sense of community beyond the lifetime of the programme.

Peer mentoring has given me a community that I can explore and grow both personally and professionally with.

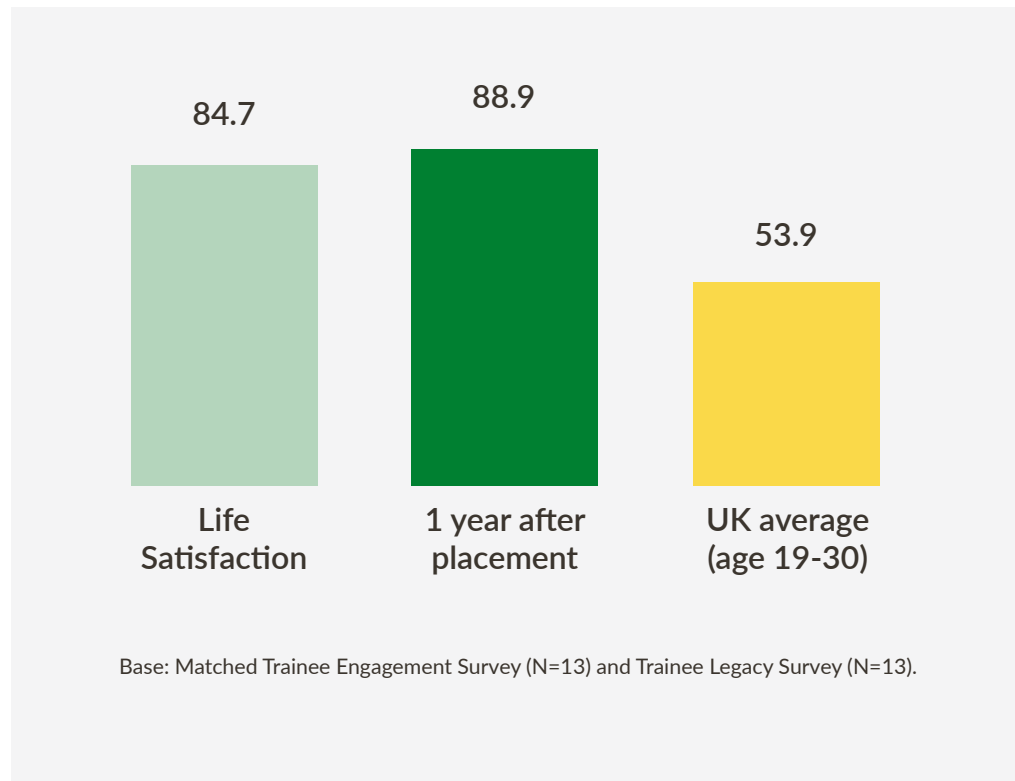
- Trainee

## 2.2.3 Nature Connection

The New to Nature programme attracted individuals with **exceptionally high levels of nature connectedness**.

- > Trainees' baseline and final Nature Connectedness Index (NCI) scores **exceeded the UK average** (53.91 for ages 19-30).

Figure 2.3: Trainee Nature Connectedness Index Scores, matched results



- > Analysis of pre- and post-placement scores indicates that **the change in Trainees' scores is statistically significant, demonstrating a positive association between Trainees' nature connectedness and their engagement with the programme**. It is worth highlighting that this statistical significance was not evident immediately after placements ended but appears to have strengthened over time. This suggests that as Trainees have gained greater exposure to working within the nature sector, their connection to and interest in nature has increased.
- > Trainees gained new perspectives, understanding that connection to nature is not limited to practical conservation tasks but can also be achieved through roles such as digital media, communications, or community engagement. For Trainees identifying as disabled, the flexible and inclusive placements provided accessible routes to nature that had previously been unavailable.

## 3. LEGACY FOR HOST

### ORGANISATIONS

#### 3.1 Placement Outcome

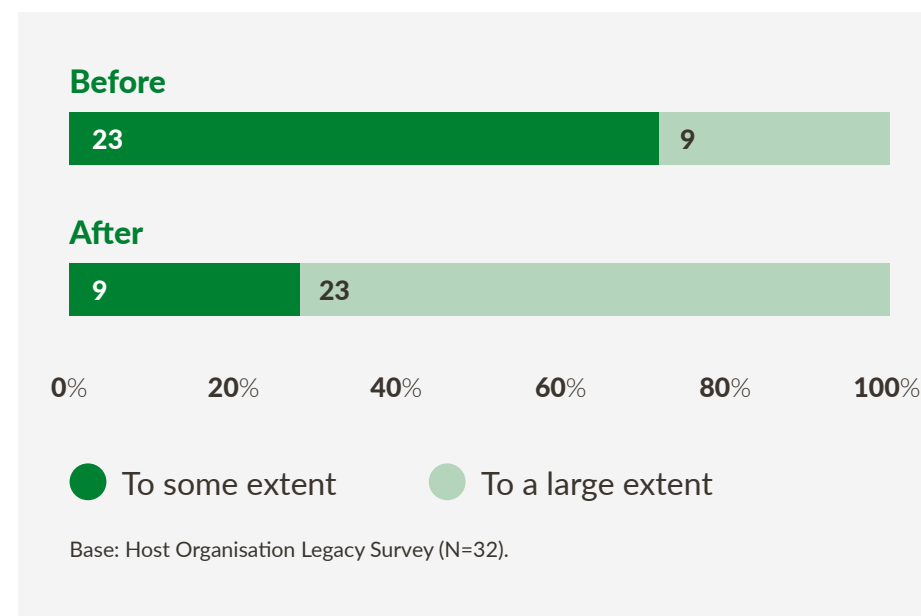
- > The value Trainees brought was evident; almost half of all placements were extended beyond the original timeframe (43%, 16 out of 37).
- > Only a smaller proportion of Host Organisations were able to offer permanent roles (25%, 5 out of 20). The most common reason cited for not offering continued employment was insufficient funding to support a longer-term position (12 Host Organisations). Five Hosts also reported that there were no suitable roles available within their organisation.
- > This challenge suggests that, while New to Nature successfully demonstrated the value of entry-level roles, future initiatives must address funding constraints to ensure the creation of effective and sustainable employment routes.

#### 3.2 Impact on Organisations

##### 3.2.1 Recruitment

- > New to Nature had a marked impact on Host Organisations' recruitment practices. Prior to the programme, many organisations described their recruitment as only partly inclusive. After participating, the majority (92% surveyed) reported adopting more inclusive approaches.

Figure 3.1: To what extent was your organisation's recruitment process inclusive and encouraging of a diverse range of applicants [before/after] engaging with New to Nature?



- > Changes included implementing structural modifications, such as adapting job adverts, amending interview formats and processes, and offering clearer accommodations to candidates.
- > Changes also included organisational buy-in to removing qualification requirements for some roles (such as degrees) and allowing more time to accommodate inclusive processes.
- > Host Organisation staff noted that the requirement to follow inclusive recruitment procedures for New to Nature gave them a mandate to make changes within their organisations post-programme. Staff in larger organisations felt more able to advocate for inclusive approaches, having seen how well they worked in practice.

### 3.2.2 Networking

- > **Most Host Organisations reported that New to Nature helped them to strengthen their connections within the sector.** Just over half (17 out of 30) stated that the programme enabled them to share information and collaborate more than before.
- > Host Organisations found the Communities of Practice sessions particularly beneficial, allowing staff to hear about others' experiences and challenges, **helping them feel part of a wider community.**

### 3.2.3 Organisational Practice

- > Host Organisations reported that their involvement **strengthened wider organisational practices around diversity and inclusion.** Nearly two-thirds (63%, 19 out of 30) stated their practices had improved to some extent, while approximately a third (30%, 9 out of 30) reported that the programme had a major impact.
- > Improvements frequently included new or strengthened equality, diversity, and inclusion policies. Examples included **implementing flexible working policies** (e.g., trialling a four-day week), providing **mandatory race and disability awareness training**, and **strengthening board representation.**
- > Other organisations focused on shifting organisational culture by encouraging cross-team working, amplifying youth voices, and adopting the programme as a model for inclusive employment. One Host noted the raised awareness around making **reasonable adjustments** in the workplace and gaining experience in working with **neurodiverse individuals.**



### 3.2.4 Personal Impact on Staff

- > The programme left a clear legacy for Host Organisation staff with three-quarters (75%, 21/28) of surveyed staff reporting that their involvement had a positive personal impact.
- > Staff gained valuable experience in **line management and supervisory skills**, including training, mentoring, and providing formal support. They gained confidence in adapting their management style to meet different needs, including supporting neurodiverse and disabled colleagues.
- > **Staff reported that the programme increased their awareness of barriers faced by neurodiverse, working-class, and less experienced applicants**, leading several to become **stronger advocates for recruiting individuals without formal qualifications.** This indicates that the programme has helped build greater awareness and support for more inclusive recruitment approaches that could contribute to wider organisational change.

- **Staff reported broader benefits to job satisfaction and wellbeing, describing working with Trainees as enriching and prompting reflection on nature's role in bringing people together.** Some said supporting a Trainee gave them new insight into organisational challenges around entry-level opportunities and the importance of staff wellbeing. Overall, the programme was seen to enhance staff development, workplace culture, and employee wellbeing.

'It has improved my maturity and skills as a line manager, it has also given me a better understanding of which restrictions there are in creating entry level posts- some of which are true across the sector, some to our organisation and which are easier/ more difficult to overcome.'

**- Host Organisation**



## 4. LEGACY AND REFLECTIONS

### FOR THE WIDER SECTOR

#### 4.1 Organisational Commitment

Host Organisations demonstrated a strong commitment to the model: **all surveyed organisations indicated they would be likely to take part in a similar scheme again.**

- > **Hosting Trainees was universally regarded as worthwhile, strengthening organisational capacity, recruitment practices, staff skills, and team culture.**
- > However, Host Organisations consistently emphasised that future participation would depend on securing a **comparable level of wage subsidy** (around 90% of wages). This high level of subsidy was considered essential to make the opportunity viable for senior teams, given current sector funding constraints, and to justify the necessary staff resource and time required to support the new roles.



## 4.2 Future Considerations

Whilst New to Nature helped Host Organisations to reflect on and improve their approaches to inclusivity and diversity, it was broadly acknowledged that there are still a wide range of barriers, which are often interlinked, which restrict the nature sector's inclusivity and diversity:

### 4.2.1 Limited and Short-term Funding

- > **Funding and limited resources were the most frequently cited barriers** to greater inclusivity and diversity.
- > Organisations struggle to secure the resources needed to create new roles, **sustain posts beyond short-term contracts**, or provide the necessary staff time and support.
- > Smaller organisations, in particular, highlighted the challenge of investing in diversity initiatives when they lack dedicated HR capacity or rely heavily on project-based funding.
- > Host Organisations stressed that **more stable and flexible funding** is needed to create and sustain entry-level roles, invest in supervision and training, and make long-term commitments to inclusivity.

'Funding and mindset combined [are the challenges to greater inclusivity and diversity]. In a time of funding cuts, it is challenging to present the need to create new roles which others may see as "nice to have" instead part of a strategy for the future.'

- **Host Organisation**

### 4.2.2 Workforce Structure and Recruitment Offer

- > Smaller organisations often experience very low staff turnover, limiting opportunities to recruit new people and making it difficult to advocate for new, diverse positions.
- > Staff reported difficulties in attracting a wide demographic of applicants, especially from minority ethnic backgrounds, often linking this to geographical location, local demographics, or poor public transport links.
- > The nature of the offer creates barriers: low wages across the sector are often viewed as unattractive. Additionally, short-term contracts, physically demanding practical roles, or inaccessible office spaces can exclude candidates seeking secure employment or those with mobility needs.

### 4.2.3 Wider Political and Cultural Context

- > Some Host Organisations acknowledged ongoing cultural and systemic barriers, including entrenched attitudes toward diversity work and difficulty securing support for new roles. Staff also noted that the current political climate, where equity, diversity and inclusion efforts are often viewed as controversial, makes it harder to sustain momentum, particularly for those advocating for greater inclusivity.

## 4.3 Support Needs

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Host Organisation staff emphasised the vital role of continuing programmes like New to Nature, as they provide a mandate and funding to champion better practice. Sustained investment in collaborative initiatives is needed to:

- Provide practical and financial support for taking on Trainees.
- Sustain a network of organisations working towards shared goals.
- Enable smaller organisations to engage without having to develop new structures independently.

At an organisational level, staff requested more **practical guidance on embedding inclusive practice** in day-to-day workforce management, such as checklists or workplace adaptation toolkits, rather than solely focusing on theoretical training



## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides an overview of the key findings within this report and a series of recommendations to inform any future initiatives.



- > New to Nature was established as a pilot to create career opportunities in the nature sector for people from underrepresented backgrounds, including those who are ethnically diverse, disabled, or economically disadvantaged. Delivered between January 2023 and July 2024, it offered 98 paid placements and aimed to support a more inclusive workforce. The evaluation finds that the programme has had a lasting and positive impact for both Trainees and Host Organisations, creating pathways into employment and strengthening organisational practice, while also highlighting structural barriers that continue to limit accessibility and diversity across the sector.
- > For Trainees, the programme provided meaningful pathways into employment, with many moving into roles with their Host Organisation or elsewhere in the sector. Trainees consistently credited New to Nature with helping them secure employment by building their skills, confidence, and sector knowledge, as well as providing credibility with employers. The programme also supported wider personal development, enhancing confidence, wellbeing, sense of belonging, and connection to nature. A supportive peer community was identified as a key benefit, reducing isolation and enabling shared learning.
- > For Host Organisations, New to Nature offered much-needed capacity and supported organisational change. Many reported adopting more inclusive recruitment practices, such as revising job adverts, adapting interview formats, and providing clearer candidate support. Staff described increased awareness of the barriers faced by underrepresented groups and greater confidence in advocating for inclusive employment. For some, the programme provided the mandate to embed these changes more widely. All Host Organisations expressed willingness to participate in similar initiatives in the future.

### Recommendation One

The programme delivery model should be retained and embedded to sustain New to Nature's legacy and to drive further organisational change across the sector.

### Recommendation Two

Future programmes should place greater emphasis on facilitated Host Organisation networking, enabling Host Organisations to exchange experiences, share challenges, and build collaborative approaches to improving inclusivity and diversity across the sector.

### Recommendation Three

Future programmes should consider models such as regional hubs or partnerships with local organisations in underrepresented areas. This would not only support Trainees in regions with fewer environmental opportunities to access placements and build networks but also help Host Organisations address the challenges they face in recruiting locally and engaging a more diverse pool of applicants.

- Despite these positive outcomes, both Trainees and Host Organisations emphasised that substantial structural barriers persist across the sector. Trainees reported challenges in securing suitable roles after their placement, reflecting limited permanent opportunities, low pay, limited role models, and the prevalence of short-term contracts. Host Organisations echoed these concerns, most often citing insecure funding as the main barrier to creating and sustaining entry-level roles, alongside low staff turnover in smaller organisations and geographic or demographic barriers to attracting diverse applicants.
- Overall, New to Nature successfully achieved its ambition to create career opportunities and has left a lasting legacy for Trainees and Host Organisations. It demonstrated the value of providing paid, accessible entry points into the sector and encouraged positive organisational change. To sustain and extend this legacy, continued investment and coordinated action across the sector will be essential in addressing the systemic barriers that continue to restrict access and diversity.



#### Recommendation Four

A key strength of New to Nature was its emphasis on fostering a sense of community amongst Trainees. Future programmes should seek to embed and expand this approach, ensuring that Trainees continue to benefit from peer networks that provide support, reduce isolation, and sustain engagement with the sector beyond the life of the programme.





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