

Environment Jobs Scotland: Skills, Training and Recruitment in Rural Natural Heritage Organisations

Report prepared by
Forward Scotland

Funded by
Scottish Executive
BP
Jobcentre Plus
Scottish Natural Heritage

Executive Summary





Background

The natural heritage sector is increasingly recognised as a growing contributor to the Scottish economy. It supports rural economic diversification, sustainability of local economies and attracts investment. Those working in natural heritage are widely being accepted as part of an emerging environmental sector and as a distinct economic group. Forward Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned Land Use Consultants to undertake research into skills, training and recruitment among Scotland's rural natural heritage organisations.

The objective of this study was to:

- review natural heritage businesses and identify their current recruitment, employment and training provision
- identify current and future skills and training requirements for natural heritage businesses
- identify ways in which skills and training could be delivered and developed in Scotland to help meet future needs

The Natural Heritage Sector

Although the natural heritage sector is regarded as a relatively new sector, most operations are well established activities of the rural economy such as farming and forestry. However, new operations such as eco-tourism and organic farming are emerging. These demonstrate increased recognition of the value of the natural heritage sector, providing new opportunities for rural enterprise.

However there are several barriers to the continued development of the sector:

- securing staff
- limited long-term employment opportunities
- limited take-up of training courses, in particular by smaller-scale businesses
- limited access to training
- high rates of part-time, seasonal and voluntary employment indicate that overall the attractiveness of the sector is limited

Delivery of Training and Skills in Scotland

The research indicates that overall, access to and demand for training in relation to the natural heritage sector can be divided into two areas.

The first relates to large-scale, government funded and charitable organisations. These tend to have excellent internal training systems that can be adapted regularly according to operational needs. Employees can also develop their skills through formal review and personal development structures.

The second area relates to privately-owned, small-scale businesses which are particularly characteristic of rural areas. In terms of access to training and skilled personnel, these are catered for considerably less well. Smaller scale operations are less likely to participate in formal training due to its cost, accessibility and relevance. Such employers place greater emphasis on the development of experience and on-the-job training.



Training courses are available across Scotland, albeit predominantly in the eastern and central belt regions. While these courses are generally very popular, access to information is a barrier affecting the take-up of training. The solution to this is to promote awareness of, and interest in, existing training courses. This could be done through use of industry publications to raise awareness of what courses are available and to help promote interest (78% of respondents use industry publications to keep up to date with developments in their sector).

Geographically, there are issues in relation to being able to access training courses, given their often remote locations away from major population centres. It is unlikely that the take-up of training in natural heritage skills will increase substantially without geographic targeting and the tailoring of courses to reflect particular needs.

Conclusions

The value of the natural heritage sector to the economy, and in particular to job creation in rural areas, has long been established. However, the complexities both of the sector and of rural areas in general, act as barriers to securing the appropriate levels of skilled staff and willing entrepreneurs. A holistic approach integrating strategic and practical solutions is necessary to secure successful outcomes.

The study shows that smaller operations, particularly those with limited career opportunities for staff, are less likely to take advantage of training opportunities. Targeting training provision for owners and managers may be the most effective way of cascading new skills to people working on the ground in Scotland's natural heritage sector. In order to encourage more people to get involved in the sector there may be value in promoting the range of opportunities. These can range from low-skilled manual job opportunities, which can be developed into careers within large-scale operations such as the Forestry Commission, to higher-level, skilled positions.

Furthermore, there are very good opportunities for business enterprise in the rural economy, taking forward management and promotion of natural heritage and developing products associated with it. The additional value for businesses associated with natural heritage can also be demonstrated, to encourage take-up of training and business development opportunities.

Recommendations

The following actions are required to improve the delivery of skills and training in Scotland's natural heritage sector:

- improve resource sharing between large-scale, government-funded organisations and small-scale privately resourced operations
- promote skills and training resource sharing between natural heritage employers with similar interests, to reduce costs of accessing training and to help overcome problems of rurality
- identify and use existing available resources, raising awareness amongst natural heritage employers of availability and accessibility
- raise national awareness of the value of the natural heritage sector to help promote the sector and improve business opportunities
- support efforts to address rural issues such as affordable accommodation and service availability
- Invest in training to improve accessibility to courses, raise awareness within the sector of what is available and support the development of apprenticeships



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Images 2 and 5 on the cover page are courtesy of BTCV Scotland.



Summary Report Produced February 2006

Printed onto Heritage Laser Colours 180g.
A paper containing 100% genuine recycled fibre waste which conforms to the UK Government's guidelines for sustainable development.