

Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership: Trainees Project

Introduction

The Trainees Project was designed to provide workplace training in an environmental, heritage or creative role for young people within the Pendle Hill landscape partnership area.

The project provided subsidies (via the National Lottery Heritage Fund grant) for employers to take on a young person as a trainee or apprentice, which would provide them with good workplace experience and provide them with a 'first step' on their chosen career ladder.

In the development phase of the PHLP we had researched the possibility of creating 10 traineeships: paid placements working with approved training providers and linked to local colleges and employers. Within the first year of delivery, however, we had realised that there was no provision for ecological, countryside or arts based apprenticeships available locally as we were in a limbo period between the old system of frameworks and the new employer-led standards. There was also a lack of suitable employers locally.

Thanks to the flexibility of the National Lottery Heritage Fund in early 2020 we were able to expand the project scope and provide two of our delivery partners with subsidised graduate trainee placements. In the end, our trainee roles were varied and included a degree level apprenticeship, 3 trade apprenticeships and 5 graduate trainees. These are described below:

Trainee	Role	Organisation	Time period
Dom	Countryside Access (graduate trainee)	PHLP team	Oct 2019 – Oct 2021 (extended from 1 year to 2 due to Covid)
Jessie	Traditional Boundaries and volunteering (graduate trainee)	PHLP team	Sept 2019 – Oct 2019
Christian	Volunteering and Interpretation (graduate trainee)	PHLP team	Nov 2021 – Sept 2022
Leanne	GIS and Projects (graduate trainee)	Ribble Rivers Trust	Nov 2020 – Oct 2021
Calum	Project Management (graduate trainee)	In-Situ Arts	Nov 2020 – Oct 2022
Emma	Horticultural apprentice Level 3	Pendle Heritage Centre	July 2020 – Dec 2021
Jenna	Business administration apprentice, level 3	Pendle Heritage Centre	Aug 2020 – Jan 2022
Charlotte	Painting & decorating apprentice, level 2	Pendle Heritage Centre	Mar 2021 – Mar 2022
Matt	Digital Marketing degree apprentice	Gazegill Organics	Sept 2019 – Aug 2021

In addition, PHLP and In-Situ both employed a graduate trainee in the development phase, and Mid Pennine Arts hosted an undergraduate placement in year 1. University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) also provided the scheme with a total of 6 summer internships from the Archaeology Department.

This takes our total to 18 traineeships.

The difference the project made to the cultural and natural heritage of Pendle Hill

The 3 apprentices at Pendle Heritage Centre have all contributed to improvements to the administration, management and maintenance of the heritage organisation, its land and buildings. They have all learnt valuable skills (administration, horticulture and heritage decorating) that have improved the cultural heritage locally and that will also be utilised in their working lives.

The PHLP trainees all developed projects and supported activity that was delivered by volunteers and contractors in improving and conserving habitats, cultural features and recreational infrastructure in the Pendle Hill area. Leanne at RRT designed and delivered a large scale tree planting scheme at Whins House as part of the trust's WINNS project, Calum supported a number of artist and community projects enhancing and engaging people in the cultural heritage of the area, and delivered his own arts project with young people and artist. Dom led and supported a number of countryside access contracts during the pandemic whilst his supervisor had to remain shielded at home and support him using remote technology.

The difference this project has made to people

The trainees developed new skills in dry stone walling, hedging, trailer towing, countryside interpretation, contract management, outdoor first aid, chain saw and strimmer use, project management, navigation and walks leadership; community asset based development; training skills; and many of them actively trained others, including colleagues! All have remained in employment with their host or gone on to take up roles in their chosen career.

"I wanted to say a massive thank you for supporting my traineeship and allowing it to happen. I've said this before, but it was an absolute lifeline to me. I can't believe I managed to pack in so many things into the year. I really couldn't have asked for a better start to my career. I'm just so grateful!"

The difference this project has made to the host organisations

The trainees also brought enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment to the workplace and to their host organisations: we all benefitted greatly from their presence. All of the partner employers are committed to providing traineeships in future project delivery, due to the successes brought by the PHLP initiative.

The Forest of Bowland AONB team has already provided a further traineeship via the new 'Connecting People and Nature project to be run in partnership with The Ernest Cook Trust and funded by NLHF.

"The trainee scheme was fantastic for RRT, as it enabled us to take on a trainee, not something we have been able to do previously, but had always sought to. It was so successful, both as a scheme and for Leanne, that we employed her as a Project Officer for just short of 12 months following her traineeship. Leanne picked up further skills and experience, before joining the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. We were very sad to see her go, but proud of what the traineeship had enabled". Jack Spees, employer, and CEO of Ribble Rivers Trust

"Emma's input and knowledge gained has helped the grounds at Pendle Heritage Centre to grow and evolve and she is an integral part of our team: we would not be without her enthusiasm and commitment.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be involved" Angela White, Heritage Trust for the NW

Trainees – interim review June 2021

Background

An interim review of the Trainee placements was undertaken in June 2021 by the PHLP scheme manager. Three trainees attended the session in person and two others completed the survey at home. Two did not participate this time, but their future contributions will be encouraged.

Settling In

All of the Trainees are currently at a different stage in their placement, and all work in separate work places, although 3 apprentices are all employed via Pendle Heritage Centre. The project aims to bring the various trainees together every 6 weeks or so, in order to share experiences, learn about one another's roles and provide a level of mutual support.

We currently have 3 trainees in graduate placements and 4 on traditional college or university level apprenticeships with more formalised training and learning provided. For the graduate trainees most training is 'on the job' with some additional courses sourced via the project budget as individual or group training needs, such as First Aid, are identified. The project budget also supports the costs of special clothing or equipment required as part of the trainee's roles.

Individual reasons for taking on the trainee role were varied: one felt the degree level apprentice was a great opportunity to learn on the job in a structured way whilst getting a 'free' degree. Others felt the opportunity to get a first job in the sector was a fantastic and supportive opportunity not seen much elsewhere, providing the practical skills to mirror their existing academic learning or creative practice. The breadth of opportunity offered to the graduates was particularly well liked, together with the balance of independent working and more direct support they experienced.



Matt and Leanne pet the lambs at Gazegill Farm, June 2021

Feedback

The Role of a Trainee

All trainees felt that their placement was challenging, but in a good way. Although they may have felt 'thrown in at the deep end' sometimes, they were keen to learn and found the work interesting and varied as a result. All participants found the workload manageable and that there was enough training and development provided: both formally for those at college and also 'on the job'; although one colleague felt that learning on the job was not well provided.

Trainees said that they found 'lots of new things to learn' and that they enjoyed meeting a wide range of people whilst working.

The Work Environment

Whilst the last 15 months have been during the Covid pandemic, all agreed that the workplace was a positive place to work and that their team had worked well together. Of the 7 trainees only one was put on furlough, and then only for limited time; and four had been working from home for most of the duration. Five had been recruited and appointed during the pandemic, and of these two had not worked more than a few days indoors with colleagues to date. So, despite everything, the team and work set up has been seen to be encouraging and positive. All felt safe in the way that risks from Covid had been managed at work.

Most people found their organisations' internal communication good, and also found links with the PHLP easy to make. Office based trainees relied on platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom to meet and chat with colleagues; with most participating in regular on-line team meetings. All agreed that it would be great to get back soon to the 'buzz of the office' and explore the opportunities to find out more about what other colleagues did and what was going on elsewhere in the organisation – those things you miss whilst working from home.

Support and Supervision

All trainees found their supervisor to be supportive, two were said to be 'amazing!' and 'incredibly welcoming' and most had regular reviews held. These were sometimes viewed as less formal 'catch-ups', with constructive feedback often given and achievements acknowledged. One trainee found feedback from volunteers they supported more encouraging than from staff, others said their supervisor made sure they were comfortable with things and confident of the next steps. One trainee felt rather undervalued in the workplace.

Formal Learning

Day release at college or university was seen to be relevant, manageable and well supported. The individual doing a degree apprentice had the biggest educational workload and was finding assignments time consuming but worthwhile.



The trainees learning about river invertebrates with Leanne, and gardening with Emma at Pendle Heritage Centre, April 2021

Skills for the Future

All agreed that the mix of practical skills and learning would help them to find future work. Incidental skills such as administration, teamwork and time management hadn't necessarily been identified as required by individuals, however all found that they were all really important and useful skills to learn. Most, although not all, found their social skills and self-confidence were also rising – for example one said that talking to strangers on the phone no longer felt so daunting.

Understanding Roles

Most, although again not all trainees, found that they had learnt a lot about their employer and also the roles of other trainees and organisations during their placement.

Overall satisfaction with the opportunity was very high.

Thinking Back and Thinking Ahead

At least three of the trainees hoped to gain employment with their current employer at the end of their placement. Others felt the opportunity they were having would certainly enhance their job prospects.

Most agreed there had been a few surprises along the way – learning about farming for example had not been anticipated by one person, but this had been enlightening in their role. Having to take responsibility early on was also surprising to a few people, but they agreed it had boosted their confidence and they had actually really enjoyed it.

Appendix – evaluation data

How do you feel about your apprenticeship or trainee role?	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It is challenging - in a good way	3	2		
The work is varied and interesting	3	2		
The workload is manageable	1	4		
I have enough training and development	2	3		
There are enough resources and staff available	1	4		
Colleagues listen to me and suggestions I make	1	3		
I have plenty of opportunity to learn on the job	4		1	

How do you feel about your work environment?	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It is a good and positive place to work	1	4		
I have enough equipment and tools	1	4		
The team I am in works well together	1	4		
There is good communication with the rest of the team or organisation	1	3	1	
There is good communication with the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership staff	1	4		
I feel safe with the way that risks from Covid are managed	1	4		

How is the support and supervision?	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My supervisor is supportive	3	2		
My performance is regularly reviewed	1	2		1
I am given constructive feedback	2		1	
My achievements are noticed and acknowledged	1	2	1	

How is the formal (college) training and learning, if you have any?	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The topics are relevant		2		
The materials given out are helpful		1	1	
The course tutor(s) are knowledgeable		2		
The lessons/lectures are well prepared		2		
I am given constructive feedback		2		
My workload is manageable		2		
The facilities are suitable and comfortable		2		
I feel safe with the way that risks from Covid are managed		2		

Is the apprenticeship giving you skills for your future?	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The practical skills and qualification will help me to find work	3	1		
I am learning other useful skills, such as organising myself, teamwork and paperwork	4	1		
My social skills and confidence are improving	1	3	1	
It is giving me good life experience in other ways	1	4		

Have you gained a better understanding of the role of:	Much better	Little better	No
Your employer	4		1
The other trainees/apprentices	4	1	
Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership	4	1	
Other organisations I work alongside	2		

How satisfied with the apprenticeship are you so far overall?			
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
4	1		

Trainees – summary of exit interviews Dec 2022

Introduction

Following on from the interim review, each trainee was asked to do an exit interview to further capture their thoughts and feedback at the end of their replacements.

Unfortunately, two of the apprentices, Jenna and Charlotte, left their roles early (November 2021 and January 2022) due to lay-offs at the Pendle Heritage Centre brought about by the continuing pandemic, and they were unable to provide any feedback. We do know however, that both were able to secure employment and to complete their apprenticeships locally.

However, of the other trainees, Christian, Dom, Matt, Calum and Leanne contributed the feedback which is summarised below.

Were you given a clear role?

Most people found that their role shifted, adapting to evolving external pressures, which is often what happens in a small team environment.

- Yes, however, due to Covid and other issues on the ground we had to be flexible with delivery and some objectives were not met. However, that meant I got to see some new projects through from beginning to end and took more responsibility, so it was a positive change!
- No, but I was asked to define my own 'wish list' of tasks and we worked through it, objectives were always clearly defined
- It started off quite broad, but now it is more defined. However, I have no set targets or key performance indicators
- It was clear at first, but because plans changed it got a bit muddled. I was able to ask for and received good opportunities to try out an additional role working alongside a countryside ranger, and I was very pleased with that

Did the role live up to your expectations, and if not, why?

Most people agreed that their expectations had been well met and even exceeded.

- ✓ I got a breadth of practical experience, it really fleshed out my CV
- ✓ I've done everything I wanted to. The initial role was quite vague, so I was in control
- ✓ I had more autonomy and responsibility than expected: it exceeded my expectations
- ✓ The role changed and evolved due to the demands of the scheme coming to an end and it had to be more responsive to that than to my personal needs

If you could change anything about your role or organisation what would that be and why?

There were some interesting suggestions here:

- ❖ I'd like to see more curation of artists taking place
- ❖ I would be happy to receive more constructive criticism

- ❖ This was my first real job, so I have nothing to compare it to!
- ❖ The company needs to be a bit more organised generally

Were you happy with the level of supervision you received?

Again, some mixed responses here.....

- ✓ Yes, she is my new 'Mum'! very approachable and gives good feedback
- ✓ I think she was excellent, and I am happy that she will remain my manager in my new role
- ✓ I felt a bit lost sometimes. I could have done with more support at the start perhaps
- ✓ I felt incredibly supported and was given the opportunity to contribute to things a trainee might not ordinarily do, partly I realise because of the two year role I was lucky to have

What were the best and worst parts?

The world of work, it was discovered, is very different from school and university. This difference was made even more stark by the fact that most of our trainees had to work from home during the pandemic, some at the very start of their term which was extremely difficult. Dealing with competing priorities and having to actively ask for help were new challenges for most.

Unattractive work environments were also mentioned, and the frustration of being indoors at a desk rather than outside on a sunny day. Dealing with delays and negotiations were some of the downsides; but then, it was agreed that finding out what things you don't enjoy is important for your future choices too.

On a positive note:

- ❖ Solving problems feels great!
- ❖ I loved working with volunteers and participants, the camaraderie and feedback was great
- ❖ Getting involved as an equal in team discussions and planning for the future together gave me confidence
- ❖ I feel more confident, less nervous: I can now speak in public and even enjoyed training colleagues
- ❖ The pay off of seeing a project that I put together, and then completed, gave me a lot of personal satisfaction

And what comes next?

All of our trainees, bar Matt who has another year of his apprenticeship to complete, will be moving into paid roles, three of them with their existing employer. This shows how successful the trainee role is in preparing people for work and enabling them to build up relevant skills and experience. It also provides the employer with a fantastic 'trial' at taking on young people with promise but little work experience, and the opportunity to train them up via experienced and supportive team members and colleagues.

- Before I start my new role with In-Situ I will be undertaking a fellowship, with 3 weeks in Rome! My new role is going to be different and exciting. I want to be clear I am no longer an assistant: I will be a programme producer
- I have secured work as a conservation projects contractor, so will be working physically outdoors – and over the winter!
- RRT have created a role in citizen science and project management for me, and there will be other opportunities coming up too

- I have been successful in securing a new role with the Forest of Bowland AONB team as Lancashire Peatlands officer – my experience in contract design and management developed in my trainee role has been crucial to this; plus they were aware of my skills and interest in peatlands from college.

Conclusions

The Trainee project has been a delight to be a part of. Working with these young people who are just embarking on their chosen careers has been a privilege and lots of fun too. I am in awe of the amount of studying they had done to get this far, and the challenges they overcame to get appointed, especially during the pandemic.

It's tough being a graduate right now, and I'm so pleased that the PHLP has been able to give these people a foot up. They were all excellent candidates of course, but I think that we, as employers, have definitely added to their skills and knowledge base; and most certainly given them a positive experience of working life. I am very proud of them all.

Cathy Hopley

PHLP Programme Manager & Trainees project lead