

The Youth Environmental Service

Despite overwhelming calls for more action on the ground, there are still gaps in the funding, skills, and capacity needed to deliver an ambitious green agenda.

For young people, our collective failure to act now leaves them facing an environmental catastrophe that will dominate the rest of their lives. They want to be part of the solution, but opportunities are scarce, and they remain sceptical of their ability to affect real change at any scale.

The next generation need hands-on work opportunities where they can build the knowledge, practical skills, and confidence to become effective green leaders.

Our Mission

The Youth Environmental Service aims to kickstart meaningful work opportunities for young people across the UK. We want to create the next generation of environmentalists, equipping them with the skills, connections, and confidence they need to address the climate emergency, together.

To do this, we will empower environmental organisations, big and small, to run fantastic entry-level placements for young people. We'll support them to attract the best candidates from all walks of life, with a particular focus on engaging young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. And we'll support them to make sure those placements are a success, with learning, mentoring, and connections across the YES network.

In doing so, we want young people to help lead the charge on healing (and being healed by) our natural environment as part of mitigating against human-led climate catastrophe. The programme will be targeted at a combination of school leavers, university graduates, and early career switchers. In particular, our priority is to offer viable and accessible routes into the environmental sector for young people from disadvantaged, marginalised and historically under-represented communities, helping to address the sector's long standing diversity challenges and ensuring that the environmental movement is for everyone.

How it works in practice

For young people, their year as a YES trainee will involve varied, fulfilling, and foundational work in environmentally-focused organisations across different sectors. Alongside day-to-day work there will be opportunities to connect with other YES participants, learning with and from one another as they develop the technical and soft skills they need to create positive environmental change.

The placements themselves will be created by existing environmental organisations across the country. The roles will be centred around creating positive environmental change, and should help inspire new possibilities in the participants. Participating organisations will be able to build their own capacities, extending and enhancing their impact. By doing so, YES will contribute to a wider cultural shift both within the sector and in society at large.

Our role will be as an enabler – this means that we will...

- Help organisations identify and recruit young, enthusiastic people from across the UK, especially those from historically under-represented backgrounds, acting as the central hub for environmental opportunities.
- Facilitate additional learning and support, helping participants develop the skills, attitudes, and understanding so they can thrive in their placements and in the rest of their lives.
- Operate as a network convener, bringing together participants and organisations, united by the same overarching mission. We want young people to learn with and from one another, helping build a system-wide movement for the environment
- Provide ongoing support and mentoring for the participants, both within their role and looking ahead, helping them to identify the direction they want to take their career and the skills they will need to get there.

The potential impact

We believe YES will create lasting positive impact, both now and in years to come, for participants, the sector, society, and for our planet.

At the core, enabling the creation of new, green jobs for young people will help organisations extend their immediate capacity to respond to one of the most urgent challenges facing society – the impending collapse of the natural systems we depend on.

For young people, working collectively in natural settings will increase their individual nature connectedness (with associated physical and mental health benefits) and collective social capital (with a range of associated indirect economic and social benefits).

Looking ahead, we will depend on the next generation of committed environmentalists to act decisively to avert environmental catastrophe. We need to support young people now so that they can fill growing skills gaps, inspire new thinking, and inspire a movement for positive change. YES will help shape a new national narrative around collective environmental action. Instead of a focus on changing individual behaviours and minimising sin, it could provide a more optimistic blueprint for community-led nationwide change.

The approach we're taking

Our priority is to show, not tell. Over the past 6 months we worked with more than 25 environmental and youth organisations, as well as youth advocates and environmental champions, to understand and imagine what a Youth Environmental Service could be.

We're about to partner with a national funder to support their programme of placing 70 young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds into environmental organisations in 2023. This will allow us to test and refine an approach in a real-world setting, creating something that can be successfully scaled and extended in the future.

In parallel we plan to use the evidence from this pilot to build a movement of support for YES as a long-term solution. We will be campaigning with environmental advocacy groups and young activists to get the idea of a Youth Environmental Service into the wider conversation around environmental solutions, working towards getting organisations and supporters on board for future iterations.