Heritage Fund

Racial equity in nature

A guide to recruiting and nurturing diverse early career talent

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About this toolkit

What is this toolkit and who is it for?

We've created this toolkit to support organisations in the natural heritage sector to develop inclusive and equitable approaches to the recruitment and retention of early career talent, with a particular focus on young people aged 18-25 from ethnically diverse communities.[1]

In this toolkit you'll find key considerations and recommendations to support in building a more diverse talent pipeline and promoting greater racial equity in the workplace. In doing so, we present a solutions-based approach to tackling the skills gap and lack of racial diversity across the natural heritage sector.

We've also included resources and readings to help projects and organisations in developing inclusive recruitment practices and addressing the lack of representation of staff from ethnically diverse communities.

[1] We use the term 'ethnically diverse communities' as an alternative to the acronym 'BAME' to describe Black, Asian and minority ethnic people. We recognise that identities can be complex and intersectional. We are also aware that for many, these terms may feel inadequate or limiting. We keep the language we use constantly under review.

While we've designed this guidance primarily for those working in the natural heritage profession, it can also be used by projects and organisations working across the wider heritage sector. It can help anyone looking to:

- recruit and train a more diverse volunteer base
- deliver work placements and skills training, particularly those aimed at entry-level and/or under-served talent
- build and strengthen organisational resilience and governance

How was this toolkit developed?

Racial equity in nature has been developed and informed by insights gathered via virtual interviews with a number of environmental projects, organisations and partners between July and December 2021. We spoke to people actively working to improve access to the environment sector, specifically for young people and ethnically diverse communities.

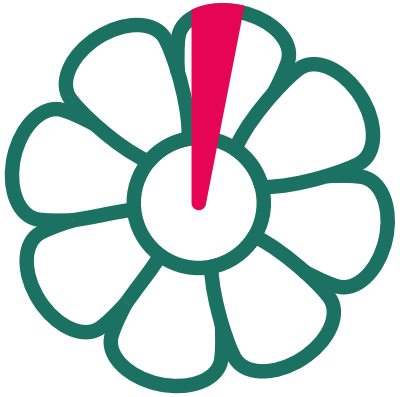
Thank you to everyone who made time for these interviews and generously shared their knowledge and experience. (See: **Acknowledgements**.)

The interviews focused on:

- exploring motivations behind increasing the diversity of staff in the land and nature sector
- understanding the challenges and barriers faced by Heritage Fund applicants, grantees, stakeholders and the wider natural heritage sector in recruiting and retaining entry-level talent and those from ethnically diverse backgrounds
- approaches organisations have taken to develop more inclusive recruitment strategies and build a more diverse and equitable workplace

Background

Staff from minority ethnic backgrounds make up just 3.1 per cent of the environment sector's workforce (Policy Exchange 2017 report). This makes it the second least racially diverse sector in the UK, after farming.



3.1%

of the environment sector's workforce are from a minority ethnic background.

The National Union of Students, Equality Trust and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment carried out additional research on diversity data in the environment sector and perceptions among students in further and higher education. They found that students from black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds were more likely to be discouraged by the lack of diversity within environmental organisations.

More recently, the think tank Resolution Foundation analysed the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the youth labour market. **They found** that over 40% of young people aged 18-24 were affected by lockdowns and unable to access employment.

40%

of young people were affected by lockdowns and unable to access employment

The impact of the pandemic on young people's employment prospects has further widened the existing **skills gaps and shortages** in the UK and questions the long-term efficiency of the sector's workforce.

If the sector delays efforts to resolve these interconnected issues, inequalities in access to the natural heritage sector will only worsen for young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

With this in mind, it's clear that the sector must act now.

Importance of workplace diversity to the natural heritage sector

Addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies

The UK government's Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener sets out the urgent action needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move to a net zero economy and more sustainable way of living by 2050.[2]

To support these environmental ambitions and effectively address the climate and ecological crises, a diverse range of people from all backgrounds and walks of life will need to be involved.

[2] The National Lottery Heritage Fund has committed to reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Read more about how we're tackling climate change – both within our organisation and in our grant giving here.

Innovation

Having a diverse team brings benefits to the workplace through collaboration and also helps drive creativity and innovative work behaviour. Avoiding groupthink (group consensus without critical reasoning or considering alternatives), and embracing differences in opinions and experiences can create space for teams to think outside the box and develop new and innovative solutions to challenges.

Organisational culture

By having diverse opinions, thoughts and experiences, you can enrich the internal culture of your organisation and create a more inclusive environment by promoting greater understanding of others.

Better delivery of service and understanding of customers

It is vital that the sector's workforce is representative of the communities that it seeks to serve so that it can provide relevant, accessible, and impactful services. This is particularly important to reduce barriers to nature and ensure inclusive and equitable access to the outdoors for all.

Legal case

The **Equality Act 2010** and **Section 75** of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The legislation protects people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation in the workplace and wider society based on protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Public Bodies, including organisations carrying out public functions, must also consider how their decisions and policies affect people with different protected characteristics.[3]

[3] You should always seek your own professional and legal advice to understand how the equality legislation applies to your organisation specifically.

Challenges and barriers to change

Before we can set out practical steps to improve access to the natural heritage sector for diverse early career talent, we need to consider some of the challenges and barriers to change. Including:

1. What are the current processes and conditions that are preventing young people and ethnically diverse communities from entering and engaging with the sector?

2. What challenges are organisations currently facing in reaching out to early career talent?

A number of organisational challenges and wider sector barriers were raised in the interviews, which fed into the preparation of this guide. These included:

- knowing **where** to look for candidates, the right channels to use and **how** to be more effective in reaching them, particularly for those based in rural and less racially diverse areas of the UK
- the sector is perceived and experienced as an **exclusive and white-dominated space**, which discourages ethnically diverse candidates in particular from applying for jobs
- unclear and **jargon**-filled job adverts are intimidating and off-putting
- **the impacts of persistent inequalities, systemic bias and racism** that can be embedded within the structures, attitudes and policies of organisations over time, including the **unequal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **lack of internal staff diversity** to appeal to and gain the trust of prospective candidates
- **bias** in the hiring process, which particularly disadvantages those from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds
- **limited financial resources** for recruitment and wider engagement work
- **requirements for candidates to hold a degree** and one within a field relevant to natural sciences
- the **language** used to describe ethnically diverse communities as 'hard to reach', which is restrictive and places the onus on these communities rather than the sector to be more accessible

Key considerations for recruiting and nurturing diverse early career talent

Advertising and outreach

Social media

Given that social media is such a fast-moving medium, knowing the right platforms to use to reach a wider talent pool can be difficult. That's why it's important to constantly review your social media recruitment strategy. **Instagram, Tiktok, LinkedIn** and **Twitter** were mentioned as effective platforms to use (2021) for advertising new vacancies and specifically in maintaining engagement with young people.

Small, grassroots organisations, with limited financial resources for recruitment and engagement work, may particularly benefit from being more active on social media and exploring different platforms to use. This could help expand your candidate reach and provide more opportunities to engage with potential partner organisations. The Heritage Fund's **Digital Skills for Heritage** initiative provides a range of practical support to help organisations grow their digital skills and confidence, including **getting started with social media**.

Whether you have a large or small organisation, it will take time to develop an effective social media strategy. You will need to learn about the platforms themselves and how to reach the audiences you want to communicate with. To support this process, consider what media and platforms your target audience are using, then think about the different ways you could effectively describe and communicate the job opportunity. This might be more accessible and engaging than just posting the written role profile.

It is important to keep in mind that **not all young people are active on social media** or have digital access, so you should continue to use other recruitment methods to give these candidates access to job openings. This might include advertising through:

- company website or newsletter
- regional or local newspaper
- jobs board sites
- leaflets and flyers in youth clubs and community centres

If you are advertising a new post via a jobs board site or recruitment platform, it could be useful to contact the website directly to find out more information about the diversity of applicants they receive.

This is a useful way to check if you are using the most effective platform to reach a wider audience.

Also consider advertising on specialist **diversity jobs board sites**, specifically targeted at early career candidates and/or those from under-served communities. There are a variety of online platforms to use, including:

- BAME Recruitment
- BME Jobs
- Diversifying
- Diversity Jobsite Official UK
- Not Going to Uni
- Prospects.ac.uk

When thinking about improving your diversity recruitment strategy, shift the focus away from trying to **'find'** diverse talent and instead look at how you can **'attract'** prospective candidates to your organisation. You can widen your reach by sharing content relevant to a range of audiences as well as spreading awareness of your organisation's values and wider diversity message.

What might this look like?

- Use your social media platforms to **uplift and amplify the voices of under-served communities** in the sector. For example, reposting content relevant to these audiences or even hosting a **'social media takeover'**, as done by London Wildlife Trust and Anti Racist Cumbria.
- Share your organisation's **diversity and inclusion commitment statement** and explain how you're pushing for change.
- Post content to **celebrate cultural awareness days and months** such as National Inclusion Week or South Asian Heritage Month. NHS Employers has curated a year-long calendar of events to help you plan your social media content ahead.
- Increase the visibility of role models through success stories and **ambassadors**, as done by Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

Partnerships and referrals

Through building strong relationships with youth partners and other community or equality focused organisations, you can successfully connect candidates with work placements and other job opportunities. This is particularly relevant for those who may otherwise not know about your organisation.

Tapping into the existing social infrastructure within your local community can also enable you to **upskill talent locally**, while promoting your organisation to future candidates.

The types of community, youth and environmental partners that you might want to consider working with to recruit through referrals include:

- youth centres
- local schools and colleges
- universities (via careers services and student societies)
- Friends of Park groups
- local Job Centre Plus
- community organisations (such as Scouts, Girl Guides)
- housing agencies
- faith groups
- local library services

Job description

Focus on soft skills

When designing your next job description, consider whether an entry-level candidate really needs specific qualifications or work experience to demonstrate suitability for a role.

If not, you might be creating unnecessary barriers to employment for young people looking to enter the sector by prioritising these. Instead, try taking a strengths-based approach and focus on **'soft skills'**.

Soft skills, also known as transferable skills, relate to the knowledge, attitude and behaviours picked up through life experiences that can often be applied to any setting or working environment.

Soft skills that organisations should look out for in early career candidates include:

1. communication
2. teamwork
3. motivation and interest in the natural environment
4. adaptability
5. willingness to learn

For example, instead of requiring candidates to hold a 'degree in environmental sciences or a relevant discipline', you could instead ask them to 'display a passion and appreciation for the natural environment'. There are many ways that a young person might choose to demonstrate these skills outside of academia. For example, through **volunteering**, participation in **extra-curricular activities** or involvement in a **local environmental activist group**.

Emphasising soft skills in the job description can give the hiring manager a **valuable insight into a candidate's potential** by showcasing how they work with others and react to different situations.

Drop the jargon

Job adverts with excessive requirements and unnecessary jargon reinforce perceptions of the sector as an exclusive place. This also **perpetuates a certain image of the 'right' type of candidate**, which can disadvantage candidates from ethnically diverse communities in particular.

Changing the wording in recruitment materials is key to writing an effective job description that is easy to understand for a non-specialist audience. One easy way to do this is by **clearly explaining any acronyms** or business terms that might not be understood by those outside of your organisation or the wider sector. Consider **asking other members of your team** and/or colleagues across your organisation to review the job advert to provide feedback and ensure that it is as clear as possible.

Try getting someone you know from outside your organisation to read the job advert before promoting it. If they are unable to understand what is required from the job, it probably won't be clear to prospective candidates either.

It is important to think about the type of language that is being used in marketing and recruitment materials and whether this might be putting off prospective candidates. This includes thinking about whether the **language used** captures the unique experiences of people from different ethnic backgrounds. Particular attention should also be taken to the use of non-jargon language. For example, 'conservation' could be interpreted differently by certain communities.

Shortlisting and selection

Taking the time to reflect and take practical steps to address our implicit biases at each stage of the recruitment process is vital to reduce the influence of assumptions and stereotypes.

To address this, you could remove an applicant's name and other identifying factors such as age, school and university name. This is particularly important to prevent name bias, which negatively impacts access to employment opportunities for ethnically diverse candidates in particular.

Shortlisting panels should consist of at least two members of staff, ideally one of whom has undergone unconscious bias or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training. You can also make your interview panels more diverse by inviting board members or volunteers to participate.

Panel members need to ensure that interview decisions are based on **suitability** relative to the job criteria. Using a scoring framework can be a straightforward way to make your shortlisting process as objective as possible.

If specific training is not available to all staff, consider creating spaces to encourage **wider, regular team discussion** around EDI to **spread awareness of workplace bias** and contribute to a process of **behavioural and cultural change**.

These discussions could take place through a range of channels, including:

- team away days
- internal staff newsletter
- staff intranet discussion forums
- team meetings

The best channel for these discussions will vary for each organisation and depend on your workplace culture and ways of working. Whichever channel you choose, discussing and defining what under-representation means for your organisation will help **make change a collaborative effort** across individuals and teams.

The power of mentoring

While inclusive recruitment is vital in improving workplace diversity, approaches to staff retention and progression are just as key. Organisations need to actively work to build a workplace environment that is receptive to all staff, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, class or disability to attract and retain diverse talent.

Mentoring is widely acknowledged as a powerful tool that helps create more inclusive workplaces. A mentoring programme can serve **mutual benefits** for both the mentor and mentee, by helping to:

- **reduce feelings of isolation** among staff, particularly those from ethnically diverse communities
- create **greater understanding** among colleagues
- **empower** early career professionals with the knowledge and tools to progress with next career steps, such as supporting with **setting professional development goals**

Other wider staff support networks you could consider include:

Reverse mentoring

An opportunity for senior leadership to be mentored by a junior colleague. This can be an effective way to facilitate knowledge exchange between colleagues at different stages in their careers and help to build trust with senior leadership, which might be particularly beneficial for staff from ethnically diverse communities.

Buddy systems

Matching a new starter to an existing staff member. This colleague then acts as an informal 'buddy' to help the new member of staff settle into the organisation.

Group mentoring

Where one member of staff acts as a mentor to several individuals in a group setting.

Listening circles

A safe space for staff from ethnically diverse communities to come together and share their concerns and lived experiences in a supportive setting.

Staff networks

Setting up a staff network can support in creating a more inclusive workplace by building a sense of community among colleagues.

Recommendations

1 **Leverage social media** to enhance your recruitment strategy and showcase your commitment to diversity and inclusion. Consider:

- How your organisation uses social media and whether you're using the best platforms to engage with early career talent. It's important to look beyond traditional talent pools and channels to expand your reach. Social media can serve as an effective tool for advertising job opportunities to a wider and more diverse audience.
- How you can make your content more relevant and in touch with young people and ethnically diverse communities. Outwardly communicating your commitment to EDI, amplifying the voices of advocates in the sector and keeping up-to-date with issues affecting minoritised group can be an effective way to do this.

2 **Reframe your requirements** and **broaden the language** used in the job description to encourage applications from a wider range of candidates. Remember:

- A key part of the recruitment process needs to go towards designing a job description and person specification that is accessible and easy to understand. This includes looking at soft skills and the candidate's potential instead of focusing solely on specific experience and qualifications.
- Keep the language in marketing and recruitment materials under constant review to ensure that it is inclusive, consistent and up-to-date.

3 **Create authentic partnerships** with other organisations and providers that share your mission and ambition.

- Tackling the natural heritage sector's skills gap and diversity crisis will require collective action to create meaningful change. Many organisations are facing similar challenges and asking similar questions about how to engage new audiences. Greater emphasis will therefore need to go towards cross-sector collaboration and developing partnerships, particularly with those local community groups or national organisations that have existing relationships with young people and ethnically diverse communities.
- Partnership working can serve many benefits in creating referral pathways for potential talent, expanding your reach, and accelerating efforts towards achieving a more inclusive and equitable sector. It is important, however, that these are built on mutual trust to avoid tokenism.
- When thinking about how to identify and establish more meaningful and effective partnerships, consider reflecting on the following:
  - What are the key motivations for both partners coming together?
  - How does this align with wider organisational priorities?
  - Are there any differences in what the respective partners hope to achieve?
  - What steps can be taken to build and maintain trust between both parties?

4 **Reassess your internal culture** and actively work towards fostering a workplace culture that fully embraces and champions equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

- The role of allies and support networks in the workplace are important. They can help with career development and amplify the voices of those members of staff from under-served groups. Organisations should also reflect on how they can create more spaces and opportunities for staff across the board to meaningfully engage with wider EDI discussions.
- The collection of anonymised diversity data might be a useful way to better understand the makeup of your workforce and monitor the effectiveness of EDI policies, including inclusive recruitment practices. To support this process, it might be useful to consider:
  - What diversity data do you currently collect? Does this include existing staff, volunteers and board members?
  - Have you identified any gaps? If so, what might be the cause of this?
  - How can these insights be used to drive change in your policies or wider EDI strategy?
- While cultural change can be difficult to measure, consistency will be key to progress. Cultural change will therefore be needed **within** organisations and **across** the wider environmental sector to foster a positive and welcoming environment that fully encourages diversity of thought.

Heritage Fund

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- National Trust
- Natural England
- Sheffield Environmental Movement
- Trees for Life
- Wildlife and Countryside Link

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