Trainees from across Wales show off their specialist gardening skills at the Senedd

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Six horticultural trainees from across Wales were honoured at a special event hosted by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to showcase how training in heritage skills has made a real difference to job seekers and the heritage sector as a whole.

The trainees who are currently on placements at St Fagans, Bute and Roath Parks,Bodnant Gardens, Aberglasney Gardens and Belle Vue Park, Newport are learning the specialist horticulture skills needed to care for Jacobean, Victorian and Edwardian gardens through the Heritage Horticulture Skills Scheme. They were awarded with certificates at the event to mark the completion of the first part of their NVQ Level 2 qualification.

The National Museum Wales-led project, which received £498,100 through HLF's Skills for the Future programme, has so far provided eight people with on-the-job training, with a further 22 people signed up.

Melissa Jordan, 30 originally from Cardiff, now living in Mold, said: "I'm so pleased to have had this opportunity to be involved in the project. The hands-on training I'm receiving at Bodnant Gardens is priceless, it's giving me the experience and qualifications I need to get a job plus heaps of confidence to go for it."

HLF has invested £17m across the UK in Skills for the Future programme, which so far has seen over three hundred people recruited to learn a range of conservation, education and digital skills. This is in addition to £10m already invested in its Training Bursaries programme.

Latest evaluation of the Training Bursaries programme shows that 90% of trainees have gone onto employment or further education within the heritage sector.

Dame Jenny Abramsky, UK Chair of Heritage Lottery Fund, hosted the event at the Senedd and awarded the trainees with their NVQ certificates.

Dame Jenny Abramsky, said: "The majority of HLF projects have training and skills development at their heart. In these difficult economic times with challenging levels of unemployment, HLF's investment in quality training and innovative partnerships can be crucial to helping people on the path to work.

"In recognition of the difference they make to our heritage and to individuals we have committed to providing a further cash injection to our skills initiatives in 2012. We will continue to invest in equipping people with a wide range of practical heritage skills from volunteer management to thatching to help increase employability and meet the needs of the sector.

"It's fantastic to see these horticultural trainees so enthused by working within the historic garden sector, and for us to be able to respond to the demand for additional places in Wales."

Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, Huw Lewis who spoke at the event, added: "This is a fantastic programme and it is great that the investment will continue to give the people of Wales the opportunity to learn practical

skills to help them into work or further education. These trainees are ensuring a continuation of traditional craft skills, like gardening, and in doing so safeguarding our heritage for future generations."

The event also included visual displays and demonstrations from people behind 22 other HLF projects, showcasing the wide range of skills that have been developed in Wales from digital archiving to archaeology.

Some of the featured projects:

Project Title: **Cardiff Gypsy and Traveller Heritage Project**
Programme: **Your Heritage**
Grantee: **Romani Cultural Arts Company**
Grant Award: **£48,400**
Volunteers will be trained to record and document the cultural heritage of Gypsy Roma Traveller communities in Cardiff by collecting oral history testimonies. A part-time project coordinator will be employed by Romani Cultural Arts Company over two years. Educational materials will be produced and an interactive, touring exhibition created that will tour venues around Cardiff before moving to a permanent home at the National History Museum, St. Fagans.

Project Title: **The Dyfi Osprey Project**
Programme: **Your Heritage**
Grantee: **Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust**
Grant Award: **£50,000**
Ospreys once flourished as a breeding species in the Dyfi valley. Now this rare bird of prey is almost absent throughout Wales with only two nesting pairs. The Dyfi Osprey Project is a community project based at Cors Dyfi nature reserve providing local people with volunteering and training opportunities to help protect the nesting ospreys and inform the 60,000 visitors each year about the ospreys and other wildlife in the area.

Project Title: **The Literature and Historic Landscapes sites of the Garw Valley**
Programme: **Your Heritage**
Grantee: **The Garw Valley Garden History & Heritage Company Ltd**
Grant Award: **£26,000**
This community archaeology project focused on the Bryn Y Wrach prehistoric mound in the Garw Valley, Bridgend. The project employed both archive research and non-invasive archaeological survey techniques to explore the history and setting of the mound to produce a number of technical reports. Young people also received training in oral history and creative writing and used the archaeological results as inspiration to create poetry and prose linked to local folktales of the area that will be available on the project website and booklet.

Project Title: **Soar Project**
Programme: **Heritage Grants**
Grantee: **Canolfan a Menter Gymraeg Merthyr Tudful**
Grant Award: **£527,000**
Canolfan a Menter Gymraeg Merthyr Tudful restored and adapted the grade II listed Soar Chapel into a community theatre complete with rehearsal space. The former Vestry and Sunday school building was also repaired and improved to create a space for community activities including a youth club, social events, Welsh lessons, choir practice and training courses. The grant is supporting a programme of events and activities overseen by a dedicated Heritage Officer which is helping to raise the profile of the building and the area's rich heritage.

Project Title: **Oystermouth Castle**
Programme: **Heritage Grants**
Grantee: **City and County of Swansea**
Grant Award: **£764,000**
The grant is consolidating the historic fabric of the grade I listed Scheduled Ancient Monument Oystermouth Castle, improving access and updating the visitor facilities which include a new educational space and a 30-foot high glass bridge leading to Alina's Chapel with spectacular views across Swansea Bay. A Castle Community Co-ordinator is managing a wide range of events, with the support of the Friends of Oystermouth Castle, to engage with community groups and share the rich history with residents and visitors.

Project Title: **Nant Gwrtheyrn Heritage Project**
Programme: **Heritage Grants**
Grantee: **Ymddiriedolaeth Nant Gwrtheyrn**
Grant Award: **£527,700**
The grant funded the restoration of Victorian grade II listed Trem y Môr terrace, Offices and Plas buildings to their original condition and the development of interpretation facilities at Nant Gwrtheyrn, Welsh Language and Heritage Centre on the Ll?n Peninsula. A Heritage Development Officer has been appointed to recruit local volunteers to deliver community based projects that develop their sense of place, creativity and skills. This heritage learning programme also offer visitors a series of interactive activities, including drama projects, oral history projects, Nant tales and Celtic crafts, granite sett making and guided walks and trails.