

How will you prioritise empowering young people to volunteer and take social action?

Young people are one of our key stakeholders in realising a nature rich future. As I reflected in the Peter Wilson Lecture at the Royal Society of Edinburgh this year, a stronger youth voice is critical across all our work to improve biodiversity loss and deliver the nature-based solutions we need to address the climate emergency. The NatureScot board recently approved the new NatureScot Young Engagement Action plan, detailing the ambitious and wide ranging actions that put young people at the heart of what we do. Driven by our work with young people, the plan proposes stronger engagement, empowerment and integration of co-design across the organisation with relevance to all minority stakeholder groups. Based on recommendations from young people, through Scotland's Youth Biodiversity Panel – ReRoute - the plan outlines how we will equip and empower young people for all backgrounds to take social action through integrating young people better into our decision-making, better engaging young people in how Scotland creates, maintains and accesses nature and greenspaces, and creating more opportunities for volunteering, training and employment. For example, we are committed to funding five years of the Future Routes Fund, a fund designed by young people, for young people looking for support to carry out environmental action. Beyond the Action Plan, we usually have a number of young volunteers working with us on our National Nature Reserves (outside of the Covid-19 measures period) as well as our funding and support for schemes that focus on volunteering and social and environmental action in areas of multiple deprivation such as the our Green Infrastructure Community Engagement Projects, TCV groups and the John Muir Award, and the Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association Junior Ranger Programme. More widely our equality Outcome 1 is Across the range of our activities, more people from BAME communities, people with disabilities, and disadvantaged families, individuals and communities enjoy and benefit from nature and all parts of NatureScot are asked to consider how they can make a contribution to this.

How will you open up your decision-making structures?

Building on the success of our partnership with YoungScot, and the creation of the Scotland's Youth Biodiversity Panel, ReRoute, NatureScot's Young Engagement Action Plan actively explores the ways in which we can open up our decision-making structures to young people. Internally, we have our own Young Employee Panel consisting of staff 30 years old and under who represent young people's views in our internal strategic and operational decision making processes. We are working to open these up further to young people outside of the organisation as well, for example, by ensuring that our Board appointments are accessible and do not present any barriers for both young people and those from low economic or ethnic minority backgrounds, and actively promoted to young and BAME people through networks such as YoungScot, YouthLink and Backbone CIC. We are also in the process of reviewing the rest of NatureScot's governance structure to see where the most effective routes are to better engage young people.

How will you work in partnership with young people?

Our Youth Engagement Action Plan details a number of ways in which we will integrate co-design and co-production techniques and methods across our organisational working, encouraging staff to engage with young people on naturebased projects. We continue to have close partnerships with organisations such as YoungScot and Backbone CIC to help us reach those who we may be failing to reach through our own channels. Rather than establishing our own network of young people, the plan details how we look to partner with already established networks of young people across Scotland, including those that have been created and led by young people themselves. We hope that these networks will work with NatureScot to help co-design projects that are in their area or focus

on their particular experiences and passions. An exciting upcoming project, the Young Peoples Forest, will be co-designed with Scotland's young people from the start, through the designing and planning of the project, through to the ongoing legacy and maintenance, becoming a keystone project demonstrating the benefits of youth engagement and social action. As previously mentioned, we also fund grants to a number of partnering organisations that lead on the deliverance of volunteering and social action opportunities. One of our Green Infrastructure Community Engagement Fund recipients, Urban Roots, has extended their funding to cover a youth worker when they saw anti-social behaviour activity increase after city council cuts to youth steer work. The Volunteering Matters Action Earth community environment small grants that we fund involved nearly 3000 young volunteers in 2019, and nearly 50% of the projects took place in the lowest 20% SIMD. Our TCV grant supports volunteering in the most deprived areas of Scotland and our John Muir Awards funding helps ensure that 25% of awards are achieved by disadvantaged groups.

How will evidence the benefits of youth social action?

Our Action Plan details the ways we will evidence the benefits engaging young people has on the work we deliver. We are looking to establish new contacts and networks to facilitate sector wide conversations, and learning and skills sharing, where we plan to share our experience and the benefits the organisation and young people involved have gained across the public and environmental sector with a good practice event along with case studies.

How will you recognise and celebrate young people's impact?

Internally our Young Employee Network uses a number of channels such as the intranet, a monthly newsletter, virtual meeting groups and transformational work events, to raise awareness of the young people's impacts throughout NatureScot and across Scotland. Outwardly, we use a number of events and media channels to celebrate young people's impacts. In 2018 we held one of our most successful parliamentary events celebrating the Year of Young People which was co-designed by the young people themselves. In addition to our own events, we celebrate the contribution of young volunteers such as Paths for All's Path Skillz Volunteer of the Year and other awards. We sponsored YouthLinks's National Youth Work Awards 2020 (Environment and Conservation category), and we also co-sponsor the RSPB's Nature of Scotland Awards which has a specific Youth and Education Award category. We look to use our media channels such as the NatureScot blog and our social media to bring light to all the amazing work young people are doing for nature across Scotland, recognising and celebrating individual's impacts and stories.