

Training skills and employment

Conservation
Volunteers
Northern Ireland



POSITION PAPER



A better environment is at the core of everything Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland (CVNI) does and providing relevant training and qualifications is an essential aspect of helping people to improve the environment.

CVNI has a long history in providing training in all aspects of the environment, ranging from environmental education for children to qualifications relevant to seeking employment in the land-based sector.

Managing the environment requires many skills, including the environmental knowledge to plan the work that is required and the practical skills to undertake habitat management. The skills to engage with communities, educate people about the environment and to lead projects are equally important.

The environment is a big employer and there are many potential career paths including public sector employers, smaller private employers and self-employment. The skills that people learn while volunteering with CVNI can be used to seek employment and many people volunteer to learn new skills. Interest in helping people gain skills to improve their career prospects has lead CVNI to deliver many of the government's employment and training schemes.

Aspects of CVNI's training includes:

- **SHORT COURSES** for anyone wanting to learn specific environmental skills.
- **TRAINING AND VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES** providing unemployed people with confidence, skills and accredited qualifications to help them gain employment.
- **GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SCHEMES** helping young people and the long-term unemployed to gain skills and qualifications relevant to seeking employment.
- **TRAINING FOR COMMUNITIES** wanting to improve their local area.
- **TRAINING FOR LAND MANAGERS** to promote best practice in habitat and landscape management.

The different areas where Conservation Volunteers can help provide skills development, training and accredited qualifications

<p>SKILLS TO MANAGE THE ENVIRONMENT</p> <p><i>The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy</i> gives a series of recommendations for protecting biodiversity and implementing many of these recommendations requires environmental knowledge and practical skills.¹</p> <p>There is need for much greater emphasis on managing the quality of the landscape.²</p> <p><i>Forecasting Future Skill Needs in Northern Ireland</i> states that up-skilling the existing workforce is extremely important.³</p>	<p>CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS SOLUTIONS</p> <p>A public programme of short courses in practical environmental skills and related subjects including: hedge laying, dry stone walling, leadership, community involvement, habitat survey skills, pond creation and woodland management.</p> <p>A programme of specialist training events targeted at land managers.</p> <p>Opportunities for people to gain accredited qualifications in land-based subjects.</p> <p>The Natural Talent and Natural Communities programmes are green apprenticeships offering participants the opportunity to gain skills to pursue a career in the environmental sector.</p>
<p>SKILLS TO HELP UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE GAIN WORK</p> <p>The NI Skills Strategy sets a vision of increased skills to achieve increased productivity and social inclusion and helping people progress up the 'skills ladder'.⁴</p> <p>Hard-to-fill vacancies in the land-based sector amount to 64%.⁵</p> <p>For the land-based and environmental industries as a whole, 41% required technical skills and also lack certain basic practical skills.⁶</p> <p>The land-based workforce in Northern Ireland will require 10,000 new workers between 2007 and 2017.⁷</p>	<p>CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS SOLUTIONS</p> <p>Environmental volunteering opportunities provide on-the-job training for unemployed people with our Conservation Action Teams. Providing placement and training opportunities for unemployed people on the Steps to Work programme.</p> <p>Placements and on-the-job training for young people referred by the Youth Conference Service and people of any age on Community Service orders, helping them gain skills and reduce reoffending.⁸</p> <p>Providing work experience and accredited qualifications to at least 100 unemployed people per year on our European a Social Fund programme.</p>
<p>SKILLS TO RUN COMMUNITY PROJECTS & LEAD OTHERS</p> <p>There is a need to involve more communities and individuals within them in understanding and caring for their local environment.¹</p> <p>The environment sector lacks skills to manage volunteers in practical environmental projects.⁹</p> <p>Working with communities and volunteers in relation to public open spaces and parks has been identified as a skills gap.⁹</p>	<p>CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS SOLUTIONS</p> <p>A programme of short courses in practical environmental skills such tree planting, hedge laying, path construction, community engagement, plant identification and habitat survey techniques.</p> <p>Our Community Environmental Leadership Course provides a flexible accredited course for anyone wanting to improve their local environment.</p> <p>The Natural Communities Programme is a green apprenticeship scheme offering participants the opportunity to learn community engagement skills.</p>
<p>SKILLS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE</p> <p>Many young people leave school with few or no qualifications. In 2010 there were 46,000 young people aged 16-24 not in education, employment or training (NEET).¹⁰</p>	<p>CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS SOLUTIONS</p> <p>CVNI runs the Training for Success scheme in greater Belfast, providing 16 to 18 year-olds with a programme of accredited training to enable them to gain employment in the land-based sector.</p>
<p>CREATING GREEN JOBS AND THE GREEN ECONOMY</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Green New Deal plans to create 24,000 new jobs working in "green" and sustainable occupations.^{11, 12}</p> <p>Climate Change will cause significant changes to many aspects of Northern Ireland's environment and economy over the coming decades e.g. flooding and loss of habitats.¹³</p>	<p>CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS SOLUTIONS</p> <p>Providing opportunities for training and work experience to 400 unemployed participants per year and a further 100 receive accredited qualifications on our European Social Fund programme.</p> <p>Aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation are covered in training for land managers.</p>



THE TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT PROJECT
Funded by European Social Fund, this project provides a programme of practical work experience, training and assessment. It is delivered from CVNI's five offices, providing unemployed participants with confidence and motivation, as well as the qualifications and experience needed to gain employment. Typically, participants receive training and assessment in Level 2 Work-based Horticulture (successor to NVQ 2) and other short certified courses such as chain saw use or first aid, as well as job-search and interview skills. A total of 58 participants completed this programme in 2009 and 64 participants completed in 2010 with the following results: Employment: 34%, Further education: 23%, other training programmes: 9%, Volunteering: 9% and Other: 25%.



COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP COURSE
With increasing interest in community environmental projects in the late 1990s, CVNI identified a need for a training programme to cover the basic skills and knowledge many people were seeking in support of such projects. In 1999 CVNI developed a five-day Community Environmental Leadership Course. In 2004 the course was further developed to include community business development and the social economy. The course was approved for accreditation through the Northern Ireland Open College Network, and covers five modules:

- **Understanding Community**
- **Communication and Leadership**
- **Environmental Knowledge**
- **Practical Environmental Skills**
- **Community Business Development**

Conservation Volunteers beliefs and values

Based on our experience of working with people in the natural environment over the past 27 years and providing training, work experience and qualifications to a large number of people, as well as the evidence outlined above, we believe that:

- Environmental skills and knowledge are essential to maintain a good quality environment across Northern Ireland.
- Leadership and project management skills are important skills for communities wanting to run successful environmental projects.
- Programmes offering skills training, job-search and work experience to unemployed people are a vital part of the response to recession.
- Volunteering offers purposeful activity for unemployed people, enabling them to contribute to local communities, while gaining skills and confidence.
- Youth unemployment deserves special attention and targeted interventions for those who are no longer in employment, education or training.
- Training and employment is effective in reducing re-offending rates by offenders and the associated social and economic costs.
- There are significant opportunities in the green economy, both in terms of a better environment and improved prosperity, with skills and training being a critical requirement for the success of the green economy.

Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland's commitments

CVNI will enable some 6,000 local people (contributing to 50,000 people across BTCV) to develop new skills that help them into sustained employment and improve their life chances, over the next three years, through volunteering opportunities and training programmes.

DELIVERING ACCREDITED QUALIFICATIONS

CVNI maintains approved centre status to deliver accredited qualifications for:

- City & Guilds NPTC
- Chartered Institute of Environmental Health
- Northern Ireland Open College Network





PROVIDING A PROGRAMME OF SHORT TRAINING COURSES OPEN TO ANYONE

CVNI runs an ongoing public programme of short training courses in environmental skills and knowledge such as hedge laying, dry stone walling, leadership, community involvement, pond creation and woodland management.

SKILLS TO HELP UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE GAIN WORK

Every year, CVNI works with several hundred unemployed volunteers. We provide training and support that will help them gain employment and many people volunteer with a view to gaining experience relevant to employment.

RUNNING GOVERNMENT SCHEMES PROVIDING TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

CVNI aims to run any government schemes and initiatives that provide training to help people seek employment. We currently deliver Training for Success and Steps to Work.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

CVNI will continue to provide training to community groups as part of our short course programme or through bespoke training, to help local people understand how to manage their local environment.

DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING OUR OWN SKILLS

CVNI is an Investor in People organisation and committed to the development of its staff and key volunteers, being awarded "Investor in People Bronze" status in 2010.



Conservation Volunteers asks for:

Conservation Volunteers will continue to ask those involved in developing and implementing public policy in Northern Ireland for the following:

- That Northern Ireland government departments recognise the value of volunteering as a way people can develop skills and qualifications.
- Recognise that volunteering is a valuable route for unemployed people to gain skills and be able to obtain employment. People undertaking volunteering need support through volunteer expenses and it is also important that Social Security and Benefits offices do not object to unemployed people volunteering, as is still sometimes the case.

For more information about CVNI's work, please contact us:
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