

Jobs for a green and just recovery – case studies on access provision

In addition to the policy paper produced by Wales Environment Link (WEL) in June 2020 on jobs for a green and just recovery, this document sets out how jobs within the outdoor recreation sector and particularly jobs relating to the accessibility of our public rights of way network and open spaces fit within the concept of green and blue jobs.

This paper starts by highlighting the principles of green and blue jobs & of a green recovery identified by WEL, goes on to providing some background information about access provision in Wales, establishing how these jobs adhere to those principles, and finally presents two case studies of access roles in the public and third sectors.

As set out in the paper ‘Jobs for a green and just recovery’, WEL considers that:

“[...] green or blue jobs are those that have a role in restoring, protecting and maintaining the environment. These jobs cover a wide range of sectors, from nature conservation to land management, sustainable renewable energy generation to sustainable transport, pollution control and waste management/recycling to sustainable tourism.”

Green and blue jobs are:

- Jobs that protect, restore and enhance the environment
- Jobs that rely on sustainable use/management of natural resources
- Jobs that focus on making traditional services and operations more sustainable

WEL believes that the package of policies towards a green recovery must, collectively, meet the following tests:

- reduces pollution
- improves adaptation to climate change and contributes to meeting net zero by 2045
- secures sustainable management of natural resources
- improves biodiversity and ecosystem services/resilience
- contributes to social well-being/ a just transition

Ramblers Cymru consider that “access provision jobs” are defined as jobs that:

- work towards enhancing the rights of way network, whether that is dealing with legal issues surrounding paths and access or physical maintenance issues
- work towards making rights of way and open access land more accessible to local people and visitors. This includes community engagement work, volunteer management etc.

Jobs providing access are mostly to be found within the **public sector** under employers like local authorities including national park authorities; community and town councils; or Natural Resources Wales.

In the **third sector** under employers like campaigning charitable bodies; charitable bodies managing volunteers; or large charitable bodies owning land with access rights (i.e. the National Trust).

And finally, in the **private sector** under businesses like contractors and access consultancy firms; or providers of outdoor education.

While it is difficult to quantify how many people work in access provision in Wales, looking more closely at countryside services in local authorities and rights of way related posts within countryside services helps get a better understanding of the health of the sector over the past years.

With budget cuts to local authorities and the decision of the Welsh Government to stop funding the delivery of Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs), countryside services and access provision have suffered huge losses in terms of money attributed to maintenance, but also with regard to numbers in stable full-time employment. Between 2014 and 2018 and across 21 of the 22 local authorities, countryside services lost 16% of their staff¹. These job losses were particularly felt within delivery-focused roles, with increasing number of grants being capital, and non-capital grants being increasingly rare and competitive.

The following case studies aim to illustrate in more detail what access provision jobs look like, how they fit within the concept of green and blue jobs and why funding jobs like these sustainably will be essential as part of a green and just recovery.

Gerallt Jones, Rights of Way Inspector, Gwynedd council

1. Background of the job

Gerallt Jones works as part of the countryside services in Gwynedd Council. Countryside services are responsible for the following areas:

- Biodiversity
- Access
- Nature sites
- Nature partnership programmes

Gerallt is one of 4 full time staff working on the ground improving access to the countryside and nature. Over the past years, due to budget cuts and changes in funding models, delivery jobs like his are the ones that have suffered the most, with the service going from 8 full time rights of way inspectors or alike jobs to 4 between 2014 and 2018, one of which is a fixed-term contract.

2. About the job

Gerallt is a Rights of Way Inspector. His job is to fulfil the local authority's statutory duties to "record and keep public rights of way open".

This involves receiving queries from stakeholders, interest groups or anyone who has anything to do with the rights of way network at any point in time. This includes landowners, members of the public, community or town councils, other statutory bodies, service providers or other departments within the council whose work impacts on or involves rights of way at any point in the process.

Once these enquiries have been received, Gerallt has to evaluate the urgency of the issue, determine how much of a priority it is to resolve in relation to other outstanding tasks. He then proceeds to investigate the issue further, speaking to different parties involved to determine the details of the problem and how it can be solved to the best satisfaction of all.

¹ Ramblers FOI of local authority access budgets between 2014-18

It is then the case of assessing the site, investigating who needs to take part in the practical solving of the issue, making sure they are available to help, and organising the work. This involves assessing the needs of landowners and other relevant stakeholders, coordinating the work of contractors and volunteers, and reporting back to the stakeholders on the situation once it has been addressed, ensuring it has been done to their satisfaction.

Gerallt Jones' comments on the matter:

“It is hoped that on the first visit to a location and after investigating the complaint, an amicable resolution can be sought with the landowner. In the instance of locked gates and restricted access by landowners/individuals, seeking an amicable resolution helps strengthen the relationship with said individuals, providing a base for any future works on their property.

Improving access by replacing stiles with gates to minimise risk of falls off stiles also lessens the possibility of a claim being made against either landowner or Local Authorities and ensures stock security for landowners.

Setting out way markers to clearly identify the correct line of path can diffuse possible conflict between landowners and walkers who may not be following the correct line of path because they are unaware of the route.

If any enquiry relates to damaged surface or structures with a high risk of injury, this will need to be investigated and acted upon as soon as possible with a view to implement immediate repairs if practical. If not, then we would close the affected section of the right of way.”

3. Why is it a green/blue job?

As cited in the paper on jobs for a green and just recovery: “nature, and the resources and services it provides, is the foundation of our social and economic well-being”. Rights of way and access is a place where the sustainable interaction between different user groups and the natural environment is crucial and Gerallt has an important role to play in this.

Gerallt's work is a perfect example of a job that requires working with nature in order to help maintain a high-quality environment, essential for the sustainable use of that environment.

Every issue on a path he is tasked with solving will require a strong understanding and consideration for the implications it may have on the local environment and biodiversity, to ensure the sustainable management of access to nature and paths. He is also an important mediator between groups making use of public rights of way and the land they cross for different reasons – for farmers and landowners it is their livelihood, and for walkers, their leisure time.

4. Why this job is important for a green recovery

WEL believes that a green and just recovery for Wales will be crucial in realising the ambitions of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. It will create the structural changes needed to allow people and nature to recover together and be resilient to future challenges.

Gerallt's job as a rights of way inspector contributes to the sustainable management of natural resources, and to the social well-being of Welsh people by enabling them to access nature and the countryside.

Gerallt highlighted that in many recent conversations with landowners, they reported a significant increase in the usage of the paths crossing their land, mostly by people they had never seen before. This, he said, is confirmed by a noticeable increase in enquiries and reports of issues relating to public rights of way received by the council.

The recent months and the number of issues reported have shown that demand for an open network is very much there, but for people to be able to make use of the outdoors, and to avoid overcrowding at honeypot sites, options need to be available to them, and this includes rights of way needing to be accessible, adequately maintained and signed. This relies primarily on the jobs of rights of way inspectors like Gerallt.

5. Final comments

Gerallt's job is one that is inspiring and skilled. He is trained in looking after our environment, providing environmental advice and guidance related to public rights of way. A strong understanding of the interdependencies and impacts of different activities is at the core of his role, and the beneficiaries of his work are primarily local communities, and those visiting who will contribute to the local economy.

His job illustrates that investing in rights of way brings an incredible return on investment when it comes to delivering against community cohesion, people's physical and mental wellbeing and indirectly contributing to the local economy. These job characteristics will be crucial for Welsh Government to invest in coming out of this crisis, as they help tackle the issues that have been particularly exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, for example related to health².

Unfortunately, jobs like Gerallt's have been at risk for the past few years following budget cuts, and are likely to face further precarity in a post-COVID world, unless Welsh Government is confident enough to stop investing in polluting sectors and **make all future jobs green jobs**, because they either proactively protect or enhance the environment as a direct function of that job, or are environmentally positive or neutral in the way work is carried out.

Kate Blair – Family Walking Trails Officer, Ramblers Cymru

1. Background of the job

Kate Blair's role is funded through Welsh Government's Foundational Economy Challenge Fund for the duration of 12 months, during which she is delivering the Family to Family walking scheme in the South Wales valleys.

During that time Kate will work as an integral part of the Ramblers Cymru staff team. Rambler Cymru are the charitable body dedicated to help design a Wales for walking, help everyone find their feet and put walking at the heart of communities.

2. About the job

The Family to Family walking scheme is engaging with families in each Valleys Regional Park Discovery Gateway area, providing training to equip them with the knowledge and skills to design and describe

² ***Excess weight can increase risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19***, Public Health England, July 2020. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/excess-weight-can-increase-risk-of-serious-illness-and-death-from-covid-19>

routes that will be promoted online to other families, both visitors from nearby communities as well as tourists from further afield. It takes an integrated bottom-up approach, involving local families in identifying and sharing the tourism product in their area, with routes being named after the families who created them. Walking routes will be promoted to families online and through hard copies available throughout the Valleys Landscape Park.

Kate's role is to engage and encourage the local community to greater involvement with the countryside and nature that surrounds them, by taking a family-led crowdsourcing approach to developing walking routes on the local public rights of way, giving the creators an important sense of ownership over the routes and therefore, the network. The scheme also aims to make a positive contribution to tourism within the Valleys Regional Park by promoting the region's rich natural resources and cultural heritage through the eyes of its inhabitants, helping to change perceptions by creating positive impressions.

3. Why is it a green/blue job?

Kate's role and project fit under the headings:

- Jobs that rely on sustainable use/management of natural resources
- Jobs that protect, restore and enhance the environment

In addition, the role has a requirement to deliver training to families on route planning and sense of place. The opportunity is taken to underline expectations that families should adhere to the Countryside Code, leave places and spaces the way they found them and discuss how they may themselves contribute to maintaining and preserving land for future generations. Finally, the project will be signposting families to the wider set of services that Ramblers provide and how they might help.

4. How does this job contribute to the foundational economy?

The role contributes directly to the foundational economy by working from a grass-roots level up to educate and promote, introducing activities based around the joy of walking to encourage local communities to discover and embrace the resources they have in their localities.

The role delivers project aims that are aligned with The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) and promotes the Act's themes enhancing the development of self-owned, accomplished, rounded and sustainable communities that offer opportunities for involvement of everyone, are asset based, utilising local assets to strengthen and create a sustainable economy, and offer support through physical activity for health and mental health difficulties.

The themes include:

- The joy of walking
- pride and celebration for the communities within which people live
- care for our landscapes and our environment
- small business support through advert, social media etc.
- cohesion - encouraging families to share their local knowledge with us, each other, families in their neighbouring valleys and the wider tourism market.

5. Why this job is important for a green recovery

Although the funding bid and the job description were written before COVID-19, the role has been able to adapt and find solutions for delivery through lockdown. Thanks to the nature of the project being experimental and with a live development, it is in a primary position to support and inform the direction of a green recovery in Wales. The set of environmental, social and economic criteria it was designed to solve will remain relevant, if not more so in post-lockdown and post-COVID circumstances. Furthermore, the project targeting geographical areas with pockets of important disadvantage, it gains a new significance through the current crisis and its aftermath, as the communities Kate is working with are likely to be the most affected by a post-COVID recession.

The scheme is addressing the following issues:

- The findings of a community consultation and research by The South Wales Valleys Taskforce identified that not enough was being made of the rich natural resources and cultural heritage of the Valleys, and that there is a need to increase tourism in the area, focusing on the Valley's heritage and natural beauty³.
- Research findings cited in the Valleys Regional Park manifesto reveal that "The landscapes of the Valleys offer some of the finest scenery and heritage in Wales and the UK. Moreover... the natural environment abuts and envelopes towns and villages, each valley having its own distinct landscapes, heritage and stories to be explored and discovered. But they remain unheralded and undiscovered by many... Consequently, perceptions of the Valleys are often outmoded, leading unfairly to negative connotations and impacts⁴.
- There is a low take-up of the Visit Wales brand by small businesses in the tourism sector⁵. A survey of members of the Federation of Small Businesses found that 68% of small tourism businesses do not make use of the Visit Wales brand.

6. Final comments

Kate's role is a skilled and inspiring job, delivering environmental education and community engagement work requiring a good understanding of the interdependencies and impacts of different activities using natural resources, whilst also supporting the local and foundational economy.

The biggest challenge faced by Kate is the short term and therefore precarious funding circle her job relies on. Kate highlighted that:

"On the one hand, it has been refreshing to work with a funder who has been brave enough to allow flexibility for delivery. However, the fund is paid retrospectively against quarterly claims so limits who can apply to organisations and individuals who can float the first quarter. Payments are also made in equal amounts, which must not exceed quarterly allocation and are paid against evidence for defrayed expenditure within set dates of each quarter. For me this hasn't been a problem because my project expenditure has no front-end spikes, but some have had problems with the administration of the grant not meeting the expenditure pattern required, bringing projects to risk if they have not secured significant match funding."

³ *Our Valleys, Our Future*, Valleys Taskforce, 2017

⁴ *The Valleys Regional Park*, Manifesto, Valleys Taskforce, 2018

⁵ *Croeso I Gymru: Boosting The Economic Impact Of Tourism In Wales*, FSB Wales, 2018