

Future Custodians Case Study: The Work



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October 2021

Work planning

The Countryside Worker Apprentices (CWA) were never short of work throughout both 18 months periods and on many days, it would have been easy to double book them.

Six months prior to the apprentices starting employment, the Vocational Training Officer (VTO) contacted existing partner organisations requesting work but received only one reply. For the whole three years, it was not possible to plan work tasks more than a month in advance. The work does fall into seasons, which enables planning for training in nationally recognized qualifications, but relying on other projects and partners to provide work meant waiting to plan work month by month.

There were other difficulties in planning work. Some partners (mainly those who owned land or where the work was determined by season rather than weather) were able to plan in advance when they would need assistance. Other partners or projects relied more on getting permission for accessing land or had to wait for the right conditions. To accommodate this the VTO had to rearrange some work and hold days aside for possible work. In general, partners and projects appreciated any work time given. Both apprenticeship cohorts proved to be very flexible with changing work plans and all projects and partners understood that the nature of outdoor work needed to be flexible.

For the first six months, the first cohort of apprentices generally worked all together. For the second six months they completed more work individually, and for the last three to six months (depending on their leaving date) they arranged more of their work with their mentors than other partner organisations.

The second cohort of countryside worker apprentices had a completely different work experience with the South West Peak LPS partly due to the covid-19 pandemic and having less opportunity to work with partners during lockdowns; but also because they were older, had greater practical skills and general work experience before they started. The National Trust at Lyme Park were not able to offer work at all because of staff and income shortages caused by covid. Severn Trent Water and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust could not work with our apprentices during the first lockdown but later the amount of work available increased (as working with groups of volunteers was still paused) and the apprentices were given more responsibility on routine site checking and could work independently.

Work for partners

The apprentices were required to do twenty percent of their working time on off-the-job training. DART, our training providers were extremely happy with the amount of training our apprentices received; proving that the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) was a responsible apprentice employer and that the apprenticeship with the National Park is a very useful career step for experience and training.

Work was prioritized in order of: work for SWPLP projects, work for partners inside the South West Peak, and then work for partners outside the South West Peak. This was difficult to enforce, as our base was right on the border of the South West Peak, partners (including the PDNPA and Severn Trent Water) have more work outside the area. Despite this, it was still a good goal to aim for.

In terms of time, it was estimated that apprentices would spend approximately twenty percent of their time training, forty percent working for partners and forty percent work for SWPLP projects. Overall, the apprentices spent more time working for partners, however, with PDNPA, the employer of the apprentices supplying a total of 136 days work for the first cohort the numbers are skewed towards the partners. The second cohort of countryside worker apprentices were severely affected by the covid pandemic. No apprentices were furloughed but worked from home for 3 months during the first lockdown and hence did more training online and work for SWPLP projects than the first cohort.

Fig. 1 Percentage of time spent working

	2018/18		2020/21	
Partner/Project	Number of Days*	Percentage	Number of Days*	Percentage
Partner	475.5	47	343.5	36
SWPLP project	356.5	35	394	41
Training	178	18	213.5	23
Grand Total	1010	100	951	100

*Each day is 1 apprentice for 1 day.

NB this shows that only 18% time was spent training the first cohort of apprentices. However, DART count all training time, including if an hour was spent at the beginning of a day. The figures here only take half or full days into account. In addition, where the VTO worked with the apprentices on practical work her time is included.

Fig. 2 Days worked for organisations

	Days Worked	
Partner/Project	2018/19	2020/21
DART	103	128.5
National Trust	109.5	10
Other Training	75	88
Partner	230	266.5
PDNPA	136	64
SWPLP Project	356.5	394
Grand Total	1010	951

Separating the PDNPA and National Trust (although not a partner in the SWPLPS the National Trust have been a key organisation in setting up the apprenticeship and providing work and supervision), we can see more clearly the balance between employer, partners and projects.

Before the apprentices' employment began, the VTO considered how to ensure that partners would have equal access to booking the apprentices' time. Work days could have been divided equally between different partners (or teams) within the LPS with appropriate types of work, but in reality, the focus was on identifying opportunities in appropriate locations at relevant times.



After only 8 weeks of work the second cohort of apprentices were asked to work at home for 12 weeks as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the first lockdown. This was a very challenging time for the apprentices who were all enthusiastic and capable. They spent their time completing DART apprenticeship units, learning to identify wild flowers and writing up wildflower surveys and waxcap fungi reports for SWPLP projects.

The photo above shows one of the new ways of working after the first lockdown, discussing work and completing some paperwork in the car park.

Over the summer of 2020, work was limited to activities where we could stay 2m apart and only working in our small team of four people, the apprentices and supervisor. Work included Himalayan balsam removal, wildflower surveys and brush cutting. Autumn 2020 and spring 2021 was almost a return to normal for outside work, despite additional lockdowns.

National Trust

For the first cohort the National Trust proved to be the most reliable organisation to provide cover for the VTO during annual leave as they had the capacity to take all three apprentices for periods of a week. The partners who received most work from the apprentices are those that also supervised the apprentice without the VTO present; giving her time for other project responsibilities including planning further training and work. The National Trust and Severn Trent Water also provided mentors for the apprentices and provided a great deal of training and personal support for two of the apprentices.



Left - Two countryside worker apprentices erecting a deer fence with a National Trust mentor

The National Trust at Lyme Park also appreciated the work *"It was a pleasure to be able to support the apprentices during their time at Lyme Park and to see their development. I know that my team of staff enjoyed sharing their knowledge and skills with the apprentices both in a practical sense but also in the mentoring process. Knowing that at least one of them has gone on to a career within the National Trust is incredibly rewarding."*

Working with the National Trust enabled the first cohort of apprentices to learn and practice several types of fencing, use chainsaws and pesticide qualifications.

Severn Trent Water



Left - countryside worker apprentice erecting a boardwalk with Severn Trent Water

Working with Severn Trent enabled the apprentices to see routine, seasonal and one off projects needed at a visitor centre. The staff were excellent at inviting the apprentices on routine, seasonal and unique projects where they felt the experience would benefit them, and thinking of the apprentices when planning work.

"It has been very useful to consider the apprentices, as I schedule work for the site. Having the luxury of asking for one, two or three extra hands for tasks has helped with the running of a busy visitor site."

Staffordshire Rights of Way

We completed a great deal of work for Staffordshire rights of way working fairly closely but only within our small team.



The senior rights of way officer from Staffordshire County Council said:

"Thanks so much for the work that you and the apprentices have undertaken over these past few years. You have made a real difference to the paths in the South West Peak area and I will definitely miss working with you."

Left – Three CW apprentices installing a wicket gate on a footpath in Hartington

United Utilities

In autumn 2020 the apprentices were able to attend a chainsaw course which further increased the amount of work they were able to do. For both cohorts of apprentices United Utilities selected a woodland where the apprentices could practice newly acquired chainsaw skills and learn about woodland management.



The woodland officer took time to explain both the practicalities of the work and benefits for the woodlands: *"The team delivered some meaningful and hugely beneficial practical biodiversity improvement work which contributed to ongoing and wider habitat protection and enhancement projects on our water catchment land. We would be happy to*

help with such future apprentice programmes and the scheme has really contributed to United Utilities objectives of provision of educational and training opportunities wherever possible."

Cheshire Wildlife Trust

Cheshire Wildlife Trust were concerned at the beginning how much work would be allocated to partners and although they do not appear in this list the first cohort of apprentices did a

lot of work for Slowing the Flow which is a Cheshire Wildlife Trust led project within the SWPLPS. The second cohort only did a minimum amount of work with Slowing the Flow as all dam work was halted during the pandemic due to the necessity of working closer than 1m to move logs and secure them in place. The Slowing the Flow project officer stated *“Over the past couple of sessions these guys have been out with me I’ve been markedly impressed by their work ethic, attitude, integration with the group and enthusiasm. A real noticeable difference, and it has been a real pleasure to have them out working with me.”*



Two apprentices with a dam intended to slow flood water

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust



Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) would have liked more work time from the first cohort of apprentices. From the table above it looks like they did receive a fair amount of time, however, most of this was towards the beginning of the apprenticeship when all three apprentices joined the SWT Friday volunteer group. For the second cohort SWT volunteered their assistant ranger to be a mentor. Without covid this would have kept the SWT in touch with an apprentice throughout the apprenticeship. After the first two lockdowns the second cohort of apprentices were able to learn how to do fencing with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and independently took on routine tasks such as

litter picking and digging out drainage channels on the Roaches reserve.

Work for partners and projects

The list of contributing partners and projects (Fig 3) shows the variety of organisations that have contributed to the project and the amount of organization that is needed to coordinate the apprentices' day to day work.

Fig 3 Contributing partners and projects

Partner/Project name	Partner/Project	Days Worked	
		2018/19	2020/21
DART	DART	103	138.5
National Trust	National Trust	109.5	10
Slowing the Flow/Cheshire Wildlife Trust	Partner	76	6
RSPB	Partner	7	2
Severn Trent Water	Partner	104.5	57
Staffordshire Rights of Way	Partner	12	76
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust	Partner	73.5	109.5
United Utilities	Partner	40	16
CMPT	PDNPA	22	3
Moors For the Future	PDNPA	7	11
PDNPA	PDNPA	26	8
PPCV	PDNPA	6	8
Warslow Moors Estate	PDNPA	49	34
Better Outside	SWPLP Project	19	4
Beyond the Classroom	SWPLP Project	7	0
Crayfish in Crisis	SWPLP Project	2	3
Cultural Heritage	SWPLP Project	17	56
Future Custodians	SWPLP Project	186.5	120
Future Farmscapes	SWPLP Project	0	17.5
Glorious Grasslands	SWPLP Project	43	56
SWPLP	SWPLP Project	0	41.5
Upstream thinking	SWPLP Project	26	99
Wildchild	SWPLP Project	6	0
Cheshire police	Training	0	3
PDNPA	Training	8	8
SWPLP	Training	60	64
Total		1010	951

Work for SWPLP projects

The CW apprentices assisted with 10 other South West Peak LPS projects, the main three that occupied a great deal of time for the apprentices were Upstream Thinking, Glorious Grasslands and Small Heritage Adoption.



The Upstream Thinking project for the apprentices involved removing Himalayan balsam from two streams in Onecote and a stream, roadside and field in Meerbrook. The work involved navigation, plant identification, use of their brush cutter training and fairly strenuous walking through a variety of vegetation. The work brought match funding to the project and enabled apprentices to work with volunteers on one occasion.

Rob preparing to use a brush cutter to remove Himalayan balsam



Jasmin and Matt removing balsam from Gun Hill Road Meerbrook

All the apprentices enjoyed working with the Glorious Grasslands project. The work involved plant surveys, habitat restoration and brush cutting, seed collecting and planting. The first cohort of apprentices completed a short project on grassland restoration and the second spent some homeworking time on data entry, writing up the previous year's grassland surveys.



Above left - seed collection by hand on Warslow Moors Estate. Above right - seed collection using a brush harvester in Hartington



Left - surveying grassland using a 1m quadrat

Right - preparing the ground for planting by brush cutting to expose 50% bare earth



All apprentices completed the training on barns and small heritage surveying with the Cultural Heritage Project Officer.



Left – the first cohort of apprentices training to record buildings.

Right – the second cohort of apprentices completing repair work on the barns trail



Variety of work projects

Thanks to the work available from other projects and partners and the persistence and coordination by the VTO the CW apprentices assisted with a great variety of work which gave them training and experience in most of the skills needed for a career in land management. CW apprentices were able to discuss areas of work in which they were most interested or felt they were lacking skills, and with the VTO, arrange to do more work in those areas. The table below describes the different work projects in which the apprentices were involved.

Fig 4 Days of Work by Type

Work Type	Days worked	
	2018/19	2020/21
Assignment work	65	124.5
Endangered species	4	6
Dam building	30.5	3
Data entry	0	5
Fencing	39	44
Footpath repair	4	26
Gate installation	12	55.5
Habitat restoration	5	42
Hedge laying	71.5	12
Induction	25	16
Litter picking	0	16.5
Planting	28	46.5
Rights of way furniture	22	24
Signs	0	2
Site maintenance	103.5	17.5
Site visit	32	50
Staff meeting	18	34
Surveys	46	47
SWPLP office work	57.5	105
Tools maintenance	43	2.5
Training	155.5	93
Tree felling	78.5	39.5
Vegetation management	68	101
Visitor management	69	0
Walling	23	38.5
Helicopter drop	10	0
Total	1010	951

There was more hedge laying than expected; at the beginning of the apprenticeships we were invited to lay a hedge just outside the SWP, this gave the apprentices more experience of different styles of hedge laying. Hedge laying and tree felling were both popular with the apprentices.

Right - One apprentice hedge laying with a volunteer



We did expect more drystone walling and footpath work. The drystone walling was not popular with two of the apprentices, (the main wall that was available for us to work on was a rather unpleasant rounded, gritstone). Twelve days of walling work for the third apprentice with a local contractor did not materialize due to other work commitments. There may have been more footpath work with the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Roaches Gateway project but work was delayed due to weather and the availability of a helicopter to deliver stone. In general the variety of work available to the apprentices was very good. The second cohort of CW apprentices completed more walling, as it was one activity that could be completed working 2 metres away from each other.



Three apprentices completing their first section of wall with one of the Farm Link Workers

The work completed was appreciated by apprentices, partners and other South West Peak LPS projects. There was a wide variety of work opportunities and organisations to provide a well-rounded apprenticeship to six young countryside workers.