

Apprenticeships in the North West's Green Spaces



A report by GreenSpace North West

Produced in January 2008
By GreenSpace North West's
Training and Skills Working Group

This report is produced by the Training and Skills Working Group.

Members of the Working Group:

Wilf Griffiths	Bolton MBC
George Broughton	Cheshire CC
Shirley Parkinson	Hyndburn BC
Dave Kelly	Liverpool CC
Peter Campbell	Sefton Council
David Brayshay	Stockport MBC
Bob Walton	Trafford MBC
Dave Cowling	Wirral MBC
Ros Johnson	GreenSpace NW

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	Halton Metropolitan Borough Council

1. Summary

Results from the survey methods used are representing fifty nine percent of the region's local authorities and whilst those commenting on the apprenticeship schemes that they have in place are limited to thirteen authorities they provide a good insight into the schemes delivered across the North West. Only five of the twenty seven questionnaire respondents were not considering an apprenticeship scheme as a key method of recruitment to the green space sector.

There is positive support for apprenticeship schemes across the North West with enthusiasm to develop and improve these by overcoming some of the challenges and providing a more cohesive career structure for the sector and apprenticeships within it.

General consensus agrees apprenticeships are the way forward to bring new people into the sector, however recruitment drives are needed.

Overall there is support for method of delivering apprenticeship schemes and positivity in their flexibility, employer choices and individuals skill development. Those who have schemes in place are committed to these and will continue to take on new placements whilst budgets allow. Analysis of the schemes themselves demonstrate a strategic approach to delivery and most schemes are long term commitments of more than two years with in excess of forty classroom days per year.

There is much variety in the salaries available as most are dependant on level of qualification, and experience/ age. This also results show a wide threshold of funding available for schemes, nearly all of which is met by the Learning Skills Council. Funding was the main barrier to green space managers taking up schemes as training budgets often prioritise other council services and parks and green space revenue and salary budgets continue to reduce. Many managers were saddened that the instability of revenue and salary budgets prevented the forty nine apprentice placements securing full time employment contracts at the end of the scheme.

Other barriers or challenges are met with positivity on how managers feel that they can influence scheme needs, build in flexibility through consultation with providers and create a learning environment. A number of improvements have been suggested such as other complementary training, continual assessments, accommodation of seasonal influences against components and subjects to include.

Of the twenty five responding apprentices all are happy with their schemes and twenty one now wish to remain employed in parks and green spaces. The variety of the job was the key factor apprentices liked with a wide range of career specialism. It is this variety of jobs and career paths across the green space sector that needs marketing to attract increased recruitment to the sector. Conversely variety requires a wide range of skills and flexibility in how these are met; combining methods of education, formal training, work experience and mentoring to close the gap in skills and empower individuals to gain sustainable careers.

Respondents value highly apprentices and wish to assist them attain long term employment and careers in the sector by having greater knowledge on how apprenticeship schemes link with other training and skill development opportunities and career paths. The findings identify a need to train the trainers, by equipping those who supervise and support apprentices with the skills and knowledge to achieve the best from and for apprentices.

Clearly there is a strong desire to attract individuals into the sector and secure long term employment commitments. Apprenticeships are valued as key to this but clearer job progressions, flexibility of formal training, continual skills development and a fundamental improvement in recruitment marketing are all considered essential improvement targets. These improvements to apprenticeship schemes are recommended targets that the region wish to develop.

Through GreenSpace North West's Training and Skills Working Group managers are empowered to drive potential solutions and link with strategic developments by working with organisations like Lantra, Apse, CabeSpace, the Learning Skills Council and GreenSpace's National Forum. The priority for the Group is to build sufficient capacity in order to achieve this and deliver the next steps to respond to the improvements recommended. (Detailed actions are included under chapter 8.)

The group has identified a number of recommendations where the solutions lie with our national bodies. These include the need for structured professional development system for the sector, advocacy for skills in the sector and the need for better coordination of information on training opportunities to allow managers to ensure their staff can access the most appropriate courses for them. For 2008 the priority for the group is to respond to the sector's skills shortage in a strategic way and develop work with the Learning Skills Council, CABE and Lantra to ensure recruitment and retention into the sector is sustained by clear career path options, appropriate training and education and a commitment to mentor and develop individuals throughout their working period. In achieving this priorities and tasks identified are:

- Regional advocacy for skills
- Apprenticeship development
- Development of new course pre 2010
- Set up Skills Partnership in interim

2. Introduction

GreenSpace North West

The North West boasts a strong tradition of parks and green spaces, highlighted by it being the first region to attain more than 100 parks with Green Flag Awards. GreenSpace North West was launched in July 2004 with an event at Manchester Town Hall. To reach this stage, aims and objectives were developed and written into a business plan with a funding base from membership across the region to support this. The operational phase officially commenced in March 2005.

GreenSpace North West is an unincorporated association – formed by a consortium of strategic partners. It forms part of the national organisation GreenSpace, which provides management support, strategic national steer and co-ordination and is the employing organisation for regional staff. GreenSpace is a charity and a company limited by guarantee. The operation of GreenSpace North West is upheld in a Memorandum of Understanding with GreenSpace and individual Terms of Reference for each group.

GreenSpace North West is a unique partnership involving a variety of local, regional and national organisations. The Steering Group co-ordinates the activities of GreenSpace North West and is the decision making body made up of member elected individuals who represent active members of GreenSpace North West on the group and any member can raise a query for consideration and decision. The Steering Group is accountable to GreenSpace board of trustees and to ensure trustees are active members of GreenSpace, many sit on the various regions' Steering Groups and/ or the National Forum. In our region, Norman Hudson is chair of the Steering Group a trustee of GreenSpace and sits on the National Forum, with the region's manager.

All members are invited to attend the sub-regional group meetings for their area. At these meetings a chair and vice chair is elected who under the groups terms of reference commits to attend the Steering Group to represent the sub-region. Items are raised and discussed and these meetings and updates are taken to the Steering Group together with suggestions for research, project work or events that the sub-regional group would like support in developing. Approved suggestions/ requests are forwarded into GreenSpace North West's business plan and associated action plan. These documents support the business plan of GreenSpace National Forum.

Members identified skills and training as a priority early on in organisation's development and in October 2005 a Skills and Training Working Group was established.

The Training and Skills Working Group

Set up in October 2005; this group has representatives from eight of the Region's local authorities. The group realised that skills and training is a challenging area and to focus their activity they decided to survey the region's local authorities. In August 2006 they published the resulting research report *Skills & Training in the North West's Green Spaces*. The writing of the report and interpretation of the data was the main topic for the group's early meetings with a number of the group's members providing detailed case studies.

The report has been well received within the sector, has been the subject of articles and has been featured at a national skills conference. Most importantly the recommendations

in the report have proved a strong foundation on which to build an action plan, a task which is well underway.

In delivering the group's action plan talks began with Myerscough College regarding establishing a new course for parks staff, and concentrated on the role of apprenticeships and employer satisfaction. A survey interrogated how apprenticeship schemes were delivered across the region and what improvements could be made. A seminar was organised on apprenticeship schemes in February 2007; this was the final stage of this second report by the group "Apprenticeships in the North West's Parks and Green Spaces" which is due to be launched later in 2008 to coincide with a national Skills Strategy and wider review of apprenticeships being delivered by Caba Space and Lantra, the skills council for the sector.

In addition to this work during 2006 and 2007 the group worked with partner organisations to increase training provision in the region. Examples of these are the events held with CABA Space on Green Space Strategies and the Civic Trust on Green Flag training. Marketing for parks training was delivered in summer 2007, supported by Lantra.

Context of report

It is well recognised that the parks and green spaces sector has a skills deficit, an aging workforce and a lack of diversity in the work force¹. Apprenticeships are an opportunity to bring new people into the sector, give them experience of what a career in parks might entail and help them develop the skills that are required. The 2006 report identified that at least 14 of the North West's local authorities have apprentices working in their green spaces and the programmes they are undertaking vary widely in their structure, qualifications and format. This report also found that although many types of council are satisfied with their schemes, a significant proportion is not. *Skills and Training in the North West's Green Spaces* concluded that there is a need for North West authorities to work together to improve apprenticeship schemes and identify best practice examples. As a result the group undertook to write this report. The report was completed in January 2008 with some final adjustments to be made. It was agreed that the launch of the report would coincide with the launch of a national review of apprenticeship schemes undertaken by Lantra to feed directly into that review and influence the national conclusions to be drawn.

2.1 What is an Apprenticeship?

Apprenticeships provide work based training to those who want to learn new skills and gain qualifications while working. Apprenticeships can make organisations more effective, competent, productive and competitive by addressing your skills gaps directly. They are designed to help employees get the skills needed for businesses to succeed.

The expansion of the programme in 2004, to include the Young Apprenticeship Programme for those aged 14-16 and Apprenticeships for Adult trials for those over the age of 25, means more than 130,000 employers are engaged in England alone. In 2004, the Apprenticeships system changed slightly; what used to be called Foundation Modern Apprenticeships and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, are now called Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships.

¹ LANTRA 2005. *Parks Need People Need Parks*

More new employers have decided to take part in Apprenticeships, and more places are becoming available across different industry sectors. Employers and learning providers are now both expected to sign up to a service level agreement to ensure a high level of quality in their training.²

2.2 The national and regional context

Skills are essential both to delivering sustainable communities³ and to remain competitive in the global market⁴, two strong drivers for the current political focus on training.

Lantra's report Parks Need People Need Parks confirms in 2005 that there is currently a skills gap in the UK. It goes on to say; - That's bad for the nation's competitiveness at a global level.

At the moment, only 28 per cent of the UK's working age population have skills at apprenticeship, technical or craft level, which is much lower than other European countries.

Working towards closing this skills gap, a report in 2001 made several recommendations to improve the Apprenticeships system.

After the results of this and other reports were published, the Government set a number of targets including:

- 28 per cent of 16-21 year-olds entering Apprenticeship schemes by 2005 (which equates to 175,000 young people)
- The creation of a national framework of Apprenticeships which define basic standards and strengthens the relationship between employer and the apprentice
- An entitlement to an Apprenticeship place for all 16 and 17 year olds with five or more GCSE passes, from September 2004
- A three-year marketing campaign to promote Apprenticeships and increase take-up by employers and young people



² Learning Skills Council

³ Egan 2004. *Skills For Sustainable Communities*. ODPM

⁴ Leitch 2006. *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. HM Treasury

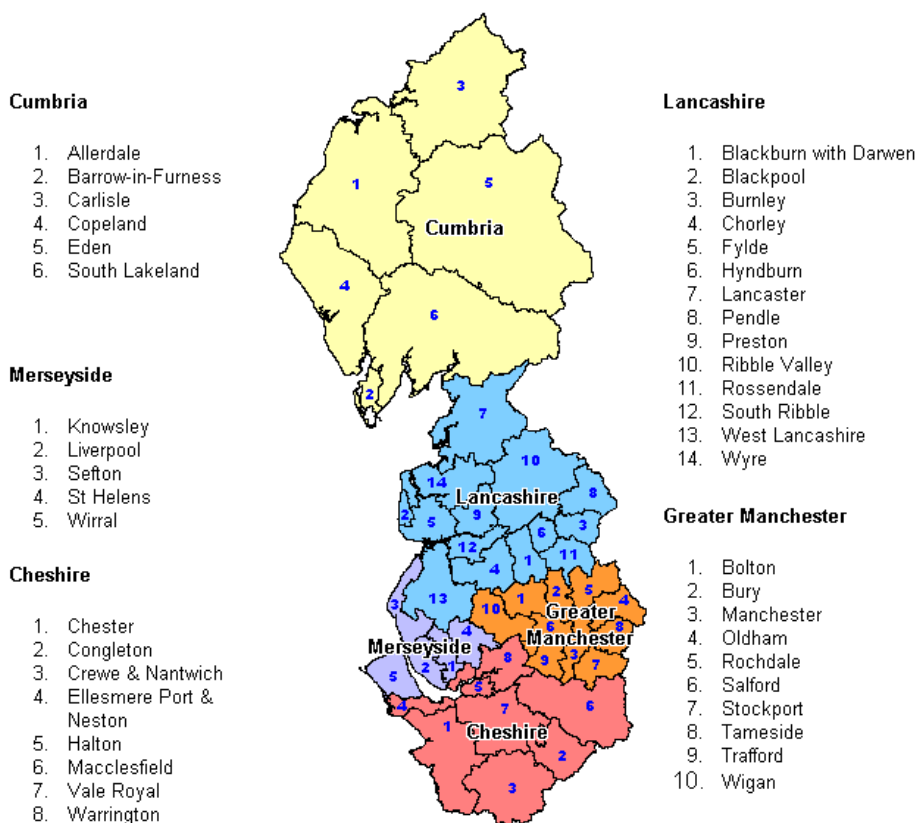
The North West Regional Skills Partnership in the North West Statement of Skills Priorities 2007-2010 report has identified seven Skills Priorities for 2007 to 2010. These priorities are a vital reference for the strategic partners with whom responsibility lies for planning and funding skills provision. This statement will guide planning, purchasing and investment decisions and activities of partners and other stakeholders over the next three years.

The priorities address demand and supply issues across the spectrum of activity. An underpinning priority is to ensure that consistently high quality of provision is available to meet the needs of individuals and employers across the region. A further underpinning requirement is to ensure that all activity addresses issues of equality and diversity.

The Priorities for 2007 to 2010 are to:

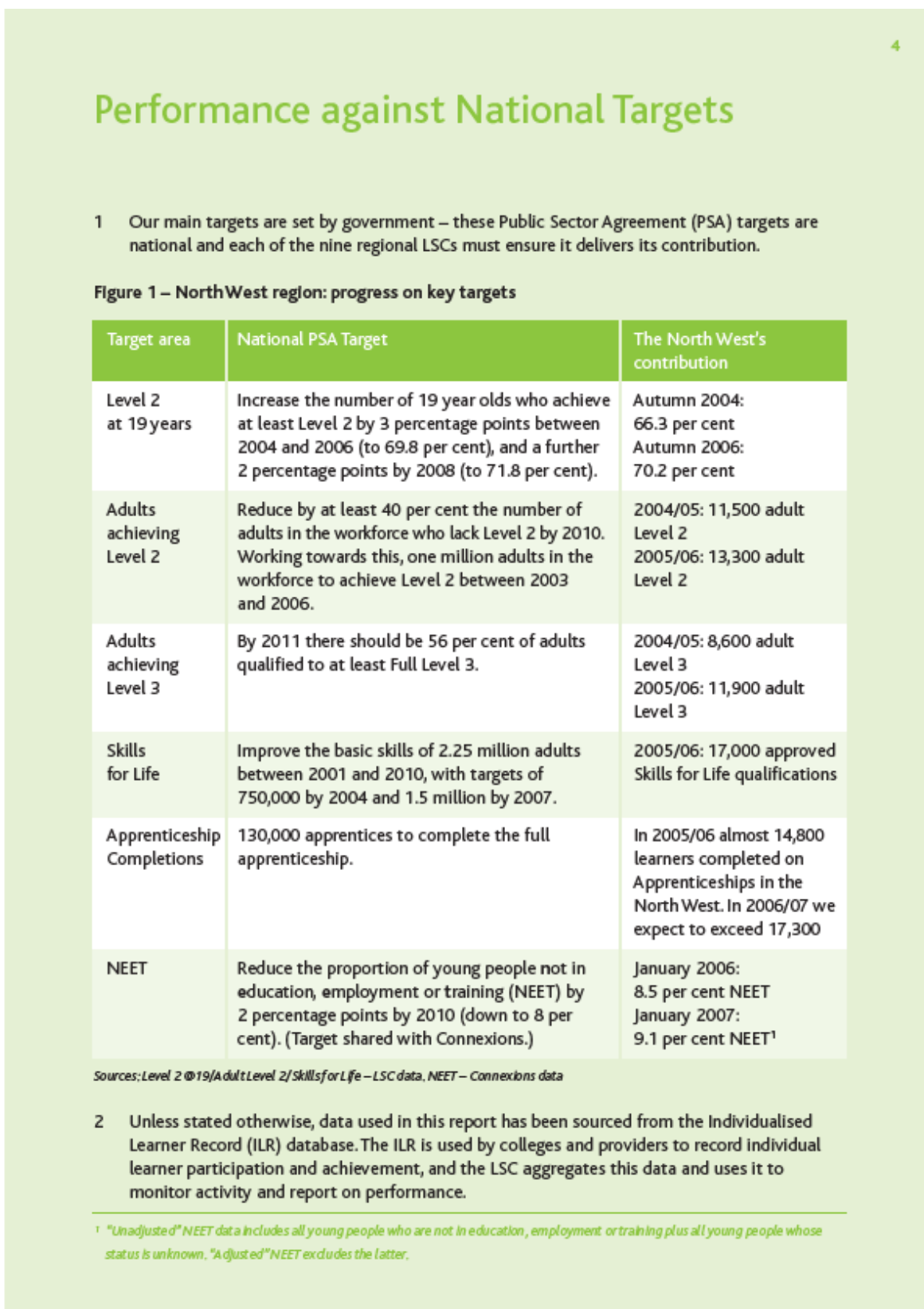
- Tackle worklessness by linking people, jobs and training;
- Increase the participation of 16-19 year olds in education and/or work based learning, thereby securing increases in Level 2 and Level 3 attainment and progression into higher education;
- Increase the proportion of adults with the skills and qualifications needed for employment, with a focus on Skills for Life and Level 2 attainment;
- Support adults to progress beyond Level 2 and to attain skills and qualifications at Level 3 and above, with a focus on key sectors;
- Stimulate employers to invest more in workforce development which meets business needs including innovation, management, leadership and intermediate and higher level technical and professional skills;
- Stimulate demand for, and investment in entrepreneurial, intermediate and higher level skills from individuals;
- Support providers to respond to the needs of individuals and employers through delivery of high quality provision.

NORTH WEST REGION MAP



The Learning Skills Council's report "Delivering Learning and Skills in the North West - Update on Learning and Skills Performance 2007" explains that their main targets are set by government – these Public Sector Agreement (PSA) targets are national and each of the nine regional LSCs must ensure it delivers its contribution. Below is an extraction from that report:

Figure 1 – North West region: progress on key targets



3. Objectives

- To identify how we can enable more authorities to establish schemes
- To identify how we can improve the standard of schemes
- To identify common challenges
- To identify successful models or features of schemes for use in best practice examples
- To obtain the apprentices perspective

4. Methodology

Two questionnaires were developed by the GreenSpace North West Training Working Group with support from Lantra and Apse. The group includes representatives from 8 authorities in the region and their detailed knowledge of their own organisations has been used both in the design of the questionnaires and the interpretation of the data.

4.1 Questionnaires

The apprentice manager questionnaire (see appendix 1) was sent to green space managers in each of the region's local authorities. It asks them if they have a scheme and then looks at the structure and funding in some detail. It goes on to look at schemes' objectives and if they are achieving what they set out to do.

A second, short questionnaire was developed targeted at apprentices in order to gain their perspective and give a balanced view of how successful schemes are (see appendix 2). This questionnaire was also sent to green space managers in the North West's councils with a request for them to pass it on to their apprentices.

4.2 Seminar on apprenticeships

A seminar on North West green space apprenticeships was hosted by Hyndburn Borough Council on the 9th February 2007. There were approximately 50 attendees including both apprentice managers, funding organisations and training providers. The format of the day was based on the preliminary findings from the apprentice managers' questionnaires. There were a number of presentations and also the audience was split into four groups for an hour to discuss the following questions:

1. List the challenges that horticultural / green space apprenticeship schemes present for the organisations represented.
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of NVQs as the standard qualifications for apprenticeship schemes?
3. Are apprenticeships the way forward for bringing new, skilled people into the sector and if not, what alternatives are there?

The groups all summarised their findings in a plenary session and detailed notes were taken of this session. The full notes can be found in appendix 3.

5. Results

5.1 Apprentice Managers' Questionnaire

5.1.1 Data Quality

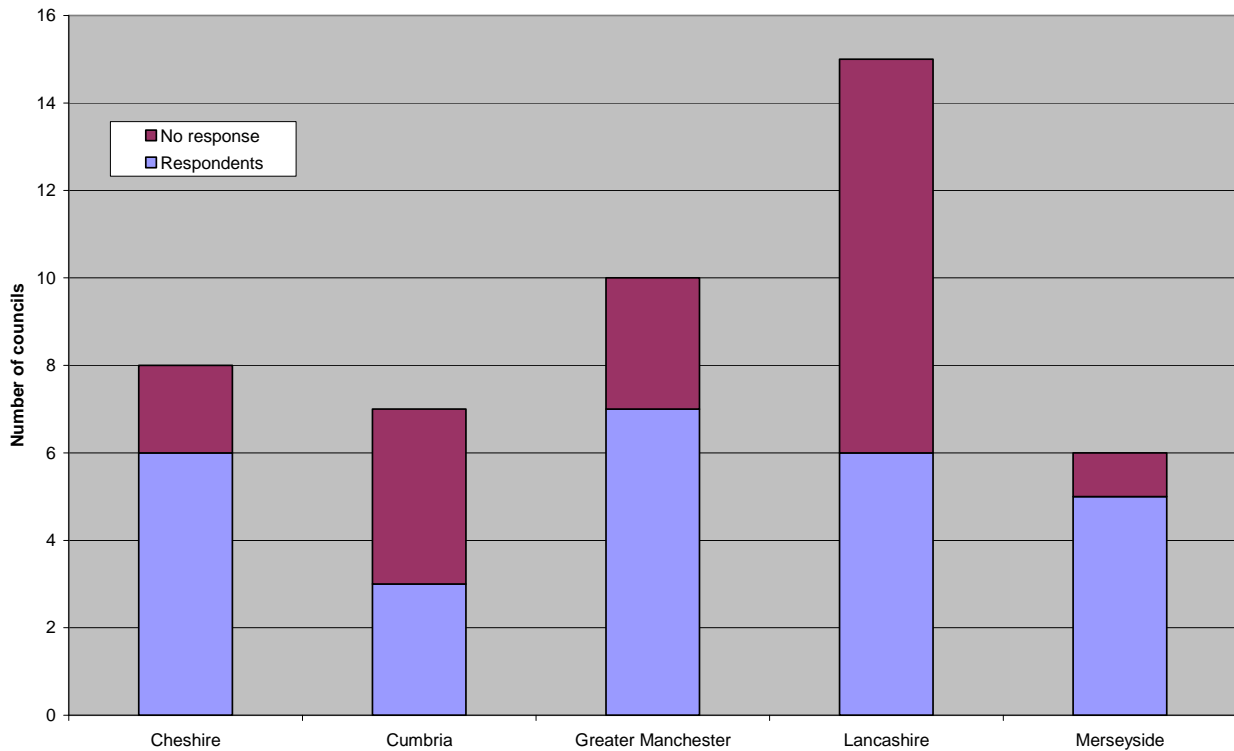


Figure 1: Geographical location of respondents and non-respondents

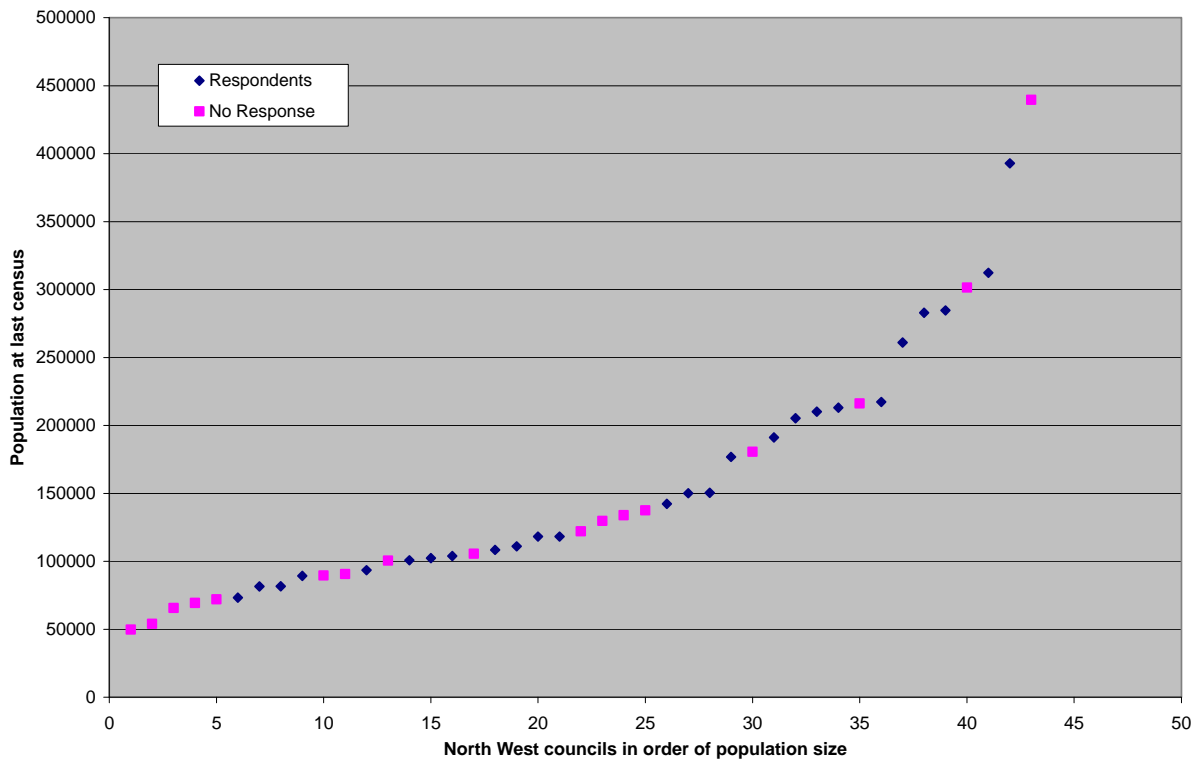


Figure 2: Respondents and non-respondents by population size of authority (excluding county councils).

The questionnaire was circulated to the 46 North West local authorities and 27 (59%) were returned. Similar to previous GreenSpace North West surveys, there has been a low response from Lancashire and Cumbria councils and a higher proportion of larger, unitary councils responding than smaller two tier councils (Figure 1 & Figure 2).

5.1.2 Those without Apprenticeship Schemes

Fourteen of the 27 respondents do not have apprenticeship schemes. This is not likely to be indicative of the true ratio as the questionnaire is quicker to complete for this group. As can be seen from Figure 3, there are fewer small councils with apprentices than larger councils. Nine of the 14 are considering establishing a scheme, five are not. When asked in a free text box 'Please describe any barriers you have establishing an apprenticeship scheme' eight of the fourteen stated that funding is a barrier. In addition one felt that the NVQ was not giving them the skills that they need, one had concerns about recruitment, two do not have time to set up a scheme, one authority is undergoing major staff cuts and another is concerned about availability of jobs when the apprentices graduate.

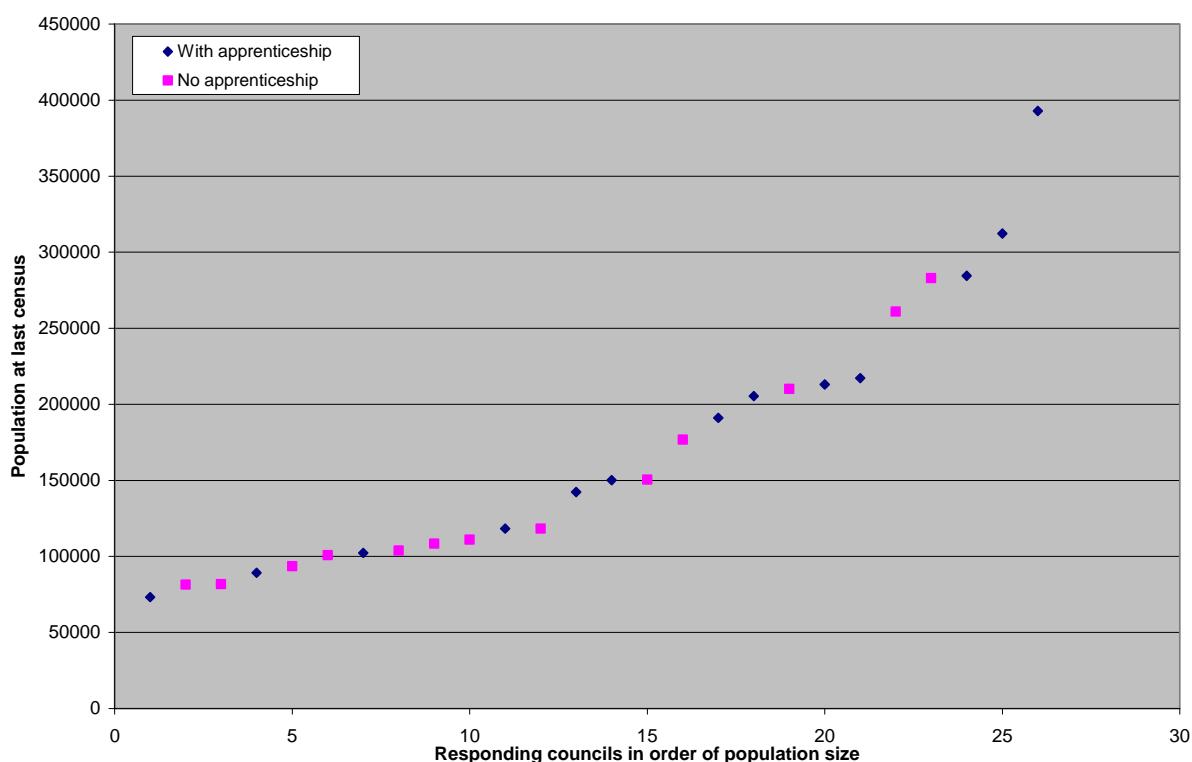


Figure 3: Councils with and without apprenticeships against the population at the last census (excluding County Councils).

5.1.3 Those with Apprenticeship Schemes

Thirteen respondents have apprentices; these are currently employing 39 apprentices, with the potential to employ 49 when all the places are filled.

5.1.3.1 Recruitment Frequency

Five respondents recruit annually and one biannually. One authority has put recruitment on hold, one has no plans to recruit and five do not have a regular recruitment pattern, depending upon service need or the number of apprentices.

5.1.3.2 Duration of scheme

Duration	number of respondents
1 year	1 authority
2 years	4 authorities
2-3 years	1 authority
3 years	6 authorities
3-5 years	1 authority

Table 1: Duration of apprenticeship schemes by number of respondents

5.1.3.3 Days classroom training per year

Days / year	number of respondents
12 days	2 authority
40 days	4 authorities
52 days	5 authority
mainly on the job	2 authorities

Table 2: Number of days classroom training per year

5.1.3.4 Qualifications

- Ten of the schemes lead to an NVQ level 2,
 - Five in amenity horticulture.
 - One in Arboriculture with NPTC Certification.
 - One of these gives the option of going to NVQ level 3
- Three go to NVQ level 3
 - One in conjunction with the RHS General.

Nine were satisfied and 4 were not with the skills and training the qualification provides.

5.1.3.5 Training organisation

One did not respond to this question and one stated a non-specific horticultural college. Two use in-house providers, one Knowsley Community College, one Manchester City Training Centre, five Myerscough College and two Reaseheath College.

5.1.3.6 Training Plans

Training Plans	number of respondents
Yes	8 authorities
No	3 authorities
No answer	2 authority

Table 3: Number of authorities with training plans for apprentices

5.1.3.7 Features of the scheme

Ten respondents described their scheme in some way with nine focusing on the types of rotations they offer students, which will be in part be due to the wording of the question. Rotations include cemeteries, arboriculture, nursery work, sports grounds and country parks. In addition one respondent includes the administration team in the rotation and one describes focusing in the team that they most excelled in during the second year.

5.1.3.8 Salaries, costs & funding

When asked for the salary of a student the responses were varied and rarely specific.

- Six did not give a figure
 - two giving no response
 - one stating it depends on age
 - one stating it depends upon the time of year

- one giving a training allowance
- one stating the national minimum wage

The salaries stated were:

£2860, £4692 - £8585 (depending on age), £5200, £8320, £8362.44 – £10053.72, £ 11000 – 13000 (depending on completion of the NVQ), £15500

No response was given for the annual expected cost of an apprentice by five respondents, one stating depends upon age, one that it is salary plus national insurance costs and one that it is the salary plus training costs (first aid etc.).

Figures for the costs of running an apprentice were: £6000, £9871, £10000 (two respondents) and £20000. There was a rough correlation with the higher salaries having higher overall costs.

The majority fund the formal training through the Learning Skills Council (LSC) although one did not know and one did not respond (see table 4). One stated Reaseheath and another government, although both of these may actually be the LSC. This suggests that there is some confusion about where the funding for training comes from.

The source of funding for the salary is much clearer and primarily comes from revenue budgets (seven respondents including one contractor’s revenue budget). One authority is accessing the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Apprentices’ Salary	Annual Cost to Council	Funding source for training	Funding source for salary
£2,860	£6,000	LSC / Council	revenue budget
£5,200	£10,000	Business Link	revenue budget
£8,320	£9,871	contractor	contractor
£15,500	20000	LSC	revenue budget
£10053.72 to £8362.44		not known	revenue budget
£11000 to £13000 dependant on completion of NVQs	salary plus training eg first aid, pa1 & pa6	LSC	revenue budget
£4692 - £8585 dependant on age	An additional £400 NI does not effect the lower rate	LSC	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
dependant on time of year		LSC	revenue budget
depending on age	depending on age	LSC	revenue budget
minimum wage		government funded	contractor
Training allowance £39 / week in first year, rising years 2 & 3	£10,000	revenue budget	revenue budget
			revenue budget
		college	revenue budget

Table 4: Lists of costs and funding sources for each apprenticeship scheme

When asked if the funding for formal training is limiting the apprentices they can attract, six have limits on who they can recruit, six do not and one did not know. When asked what the funding barriers are, four responded that they do not have enough funding, one did not have enough placements in house, one stated age criteria, the Neighbourhood Renewal Funding was limited to applicants from deprived wards within the borough and one had trouble attracting appropriate applicants on the salary they are able to offer. This suggests that these questions have not been interpreted entirely in the way that they were intended, the respondents talking about general funding limitations rather than requirements tied to the funding.

5.1.3.9 Objectives of the scheme

- One respondent did not give objectives.
- Eleven stated that they wanted access to skilled staff, three of these recognising that training skilled staff will benefit the sector as a whole.
- Two want to encourage younger staff into the workforce although one had concerns about the impact of the new equal opportunities legislation.
- The scheme funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund included objectives of community cohesion and promoting the council as a good employer.
- Two councils wanted to give opportunities to young people.

Nine are satisfied that they meet their objectives (including the respondent who did not state what they were) and four are not. Three of the respondents who are not satisfied with their schemes gave reasons for this. One had trouble recruiting suitable apprentices and also with their internal management of the scheme. The other two both felt their provider was the problem, one also stating that the NVQ route is not appropriate or challenging enough. Two of the respondents who are satisfied with their schemes gave a commitment to ongoing improvements and monitoring.

5.1.3.10 Outcomes

When asked the percentage of apprentices that complete the scheme, eight gave a figure, two did not give an answer and three stated that they are still in their first year (table 3).

Six respondents guarantee jobs at the end of the scheme and employment rates are generally high for this group. One respondent did not give an employment rate and two are new so are not able to answer this question (see table 5).

% complete the scheme	Guaranteed Job	% that go into full time employment
50	Yes	100
70	No	70
80	No	100
80	Yes	80
90	Yes	100
90	Yes	90
100	No	50
100	No	100
New Scheme	No	New Scheme
New Scheme	No	New Scheme
New scheme	Yes	New Scheme
No answer	No	No answer
No answer	Yes	100

Table 5: List of outcomes from schemes.

5.1.3.11 Support requested from the Forum

The respondents requested a variety of support from the GreenSpace North West Forum:

Information

- best practice models of apprenticeships (2 respondents),

Training

- improved training programmes other than the NVQ
- information on training providers
- improved standards of training (2 respondents)
- one off training days
- advice on existing training regimes

Recruitment

- Information on selection processes
- national standard for rates of pay
- higher pay for apprentices not dependant 100% on revenue budgets
- promotion of apprenticeships to schools and colleges

Funding

- ideas for external funding (2 respondents)

Networking

- networking opportunities (2 respondents)
- enabling cross boundary working to give apprentices a wider experience.

5.2 Survey for Apprentices

25 apprentice questionnaires were returned from 9 organisations, two of which did not return the managers questionnaire. As can be seen from the following table they are overwhelmingly positive about the experiences that they are having, although the forms were in general returned via the managers and therefore this may have prevented them from feeling able to respond negatively.

Question	Yes	No	Maybe
Do you feel that you have been taught how to do the job?	25		
Would you like to continue working in parks after your	21		4
Are you enjoying your apprenticeship?	25		

Table 6: Numbers of apprentices responding 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe' to three questions

5.2.1 What did you like about your apprenticeship scheme?

Despite the data coming via managers, the apprentices appear genuinely enthusiastic about their courses. The main thing they like is learning (seven apprentices). They also like the variation in the job (five apprentices), the different courses (two apprentices), learning on the job (two apprentices), getting qualified (two apprentices), working outside (two apprentices), an external placement (one apprentice) and being paid (one apprentice).

5.2.2 Dislikes and improvements that could be made

A number of the comments relate to local circumstances such as being more involved in the planning of rotations, the rate of travel expenses and problems that one authority is having with Reaseheath College. The main theme is the college based part of the programmes which they clearly find the most challenging.

5.3 Seminar on Apprenticeships

Following is a summary of the discussions at the seminar.

5.3.1 Challenges

5.3.1.1 Funding

Funding was a high priority challenge for all groups. The main concerns were funding wages (three of the four groups) and funding training in addition to the NVQ.

Two groups discussed difficulties in gaining political / chief executive support, which limit their willingness to fund apprenticeships.

One group discussed the unpredictability of the service in relation to staff and funding cuts.

5.3.1.2 Recruitment / retention

Recruitment of quality candidates, preferably with a genuine interest in the sector, was identified as a challenge by all groups; each then identifying the image of the sector as a limiting factor, recommending marketing / media input as a solution. One group suggested incorporating the sustainability / environmental agenda into the NVQ qualification to appeal to young people.

One group felt that salaries offered to apprentices were limiting the quality of applicants and another felt that the wages in the sector did not compare favourably with other industries such as plumbing or bricklaying.

Three groups talked about the need to clarify and manage progression routes, both for those considering the sector for a career, and for retention of existing employees. Suggestions included better coordination of the academic, non academic and career change routes into the industry and job search training for apprentices.

5.3.1.3 Training courses

This was identified as a challenge by all 4 groups and is discussed in section 2.

5.3.1.4 Managing the Apprentice

All groups discussed the challenges of managing the apprentice once in post. Topics covered included adequate support frameworks, the need for a properly implemented skills development plan, effective administration of the qualification and the need to improve partnership working between colleges and the employer.

5.3.1.5 Work-place element

Two groups identified concerns about on the job learning, both because of the lack of mentoring skills within the workforce and the recognised skills deficit, meaning there may not be enough workers with the skills to pass them on.

Two groups also discussed that some authorities struggle to give candidates a wide enough experience in the work-place; either because traditional horticultural skills are not being used as much, or due to the rotations the council is able to offer. One group discussed the possibility of partnership working between authorities to give the apprentices a wider experience, for example visiting neighbouring authorities to work with arboriculture teams, herbaceous borders, nursery work, golf courses or community development teams.

5.3.2 Strengths and weaknesses of NVQs

Three of the groups considered flexibility of the NVQ a strength and two commented positively on the strong work based element.

5.3.2.1 Quality

Three groups felt that the qualification was too easy to achieve, one suggesting that levels or a pass mark would make it easier to distinguish between candidates.

One group was concerned about the variability of the qualification depending upon the provider, another group discussed provider quality and a third raised concerns about quality assessment.

5.3.2.2 Structure and content of the NVQ

Delivery of key skills was identified by two groups as a weakness, one feeling that they should be better integrated into all modules of the qualification.

Two groups raised the need to supplement the NVQ with other training courses and another talked about the need for more formal training within the NVQ. Skills specifically identified as missing were: plant identification, conservation, fine turf, sustainability and environmental issues (e.g. climate change)

One group felt that assessment of practical skills should be ongoing i.e. competence to lay a flag, does not mean a student is able to lay a patio.

One group felt the time period to achieve an NVQ in Amenity Horticulture can be too short, as certain assessments can only be done in season. One felt that they are too bureaucratic. Also see section 1.5 for a discussion on work-place learning.

5.3.3 The Way Forward

There was a general consensus that apprenticeships are the way forward for bringing new, skilled people into the sector. There was also a positive response to the move towards more demand led frameworks / content described by David Winn at Lantra.

Suggestions from the groups include:

- Investigate methods of tackling recruitment problems
 - Support the new land based specialist diploma
 - Improve marketing of the sector to both school and college students
 - Look at funding barriers to ensure that managers can appoint apprentices who have a genuine interest in green spaces
- Look at the NVQ in Amenity Horticulture to ensure the content provides the range of skills required by the sector
- Develop closer links to the Historic and Botanic Garden Bursary scheme.
- Disseminate best practice case studies
- Look at ways of developing existing staff to provide the right environment for apprentices.
- Look at ways to increase partnership working between authorities to give apprentices a broader experience.

6. Discussion on Findings

6.1 Data Quality

Although a respectable 59% of North West councils responded, the actual number of respondents (27) is relatively low. There was a tendency for larger councils to respond and also a lower response from Cumbria and Lancashire, probably reflecting the smaller size of councils in these areas. This pattern of response has been reflected in GreenSpace North West's two previous reports and activities are underway to try and engage better with these subsections of councils.

The group's previous report Skills and Training in the North West's Green Spaces, that was also questionnaire based, it was sent to the same audience and had some questions on apprenticeships. Comparing the responses to the two questionnaires, it can be seen that the proportions of councils with apprenticeship schemes are both broadly a half (52% for the Skills report and 48% in this survey). This is despite that a number of the respondents were different for the two surveys and four councils reported having apprenticeship schemes who did not respond to this questionnaire (although two of these did return apprentice questionnaires. This suggests that for some reason they found this survey difficult to complete. (Burnley, Blackburn, Copeland, Liverpool).

The data on apprenticeship schemes only comes from thirteen councils and therefore it has not been statistically analysed as this could be misleading. However this does not mean that the information does not give us important insight into schemes in the region and it is further backed up by the detailed discussions at the apprenticeship seminar.

6.2 Are apprenticeships the way forward?

Before looking at apprenticeships in great detail, it is first important to look at what councils are aiming to achieve by them, if they are currently meeting these objectives and if they are the most effective way to meet these needs. By far the most common objective of the schemes reported by respondents to this survey is to increase the availability of skilled staff (11 out of the 13 respondents) and to bring young people into the workforce (two respondents). This was discussed at the apprenticeship seminar, a number of councils identifying that they had a skills deficit likely to get worse as a significant proportion of the workforce is due to retire in the next ten years. This pattern has been shown to be a national problem both in the parks sector⁵ and in the wider horticultural sector⁶. In addition to these practical reasons for apprenticeships, a number of councils are also clearly identifying that there is also a social responsibility to give training opportunities both to the applicants and for the future staffing of the sector as a whole.

In the original Skills and Training Report, eight of 14 the apprenticeship schemes were considered satisfactory although one was less than a year old and therefore had the caveat that it had not yet been fully assessed. Five were not satisfactory and one scheme was too new for an appraisal to be given. This was one of the reasons that this report was initiated. The Apprenticeship survey asked the similar question, did their scheme meet their objectives (as previously identified). Nine out of the 13 respondents were satisfied that they were meeting their objectives and four were not. This paints a fairly positive picture where there is still room for improvement, with approximately a third of schemes are not satisfactory for some reason. This positive picture is re-enforced by the relatively

⁵ Lantra 2005. *Parks Need People Need Parks*

⁶ Lantra 2005. *Project to map careers, occupations and skills required for the management and maintenance of botanic and historic Gardens*. Lantra

high success rates and employment rates in Table 5. In the light of this information delegates at the Apprenticeship Seminar were asked 'Are apprenticeships the way forward for bringing new, skilled people into the sector and if not, what alternatives are there?'. The consensus from the break out groups was that apprenticeships are the way forward; however this should be in conjunction with other endeavours such as increasing the skills in the existing workforce, supporting the new land-based diploma for 16-19 year olds and working with schools and colleges to promote the sector.

6.3 *Increasing the number of apprenticeships*

The respondents identified that there are 39 green space apprentices in the region with the potential to recruit a further 10. This information was volunteered by respondents (they were asked 'What is your total number of apprentices') and this therefore may indicate a wider trend of having un-filled placements. This could be for a number of reasons including drop-outs or trouble recruiting.

Of the 14 respondents that do not have apprentices, nine are considering establishing a scheme and five are not, which is extremely positive and indicates that there is a group of authorities that, with some support are willing to establish schemes. When asked what the barriers were to not surprisingly the main response was funding. This is also true for those with apprenticeships, funding for decent salaries was a theme that ran both through the questionnaire answers and the seminar discussions. It would therefore seem that this is a primary barrier to the establishment of schemes.

6.4 *Structure of apprenticeships and is there a best practice model?*

The recruitment patterns, duration of schemes and the number of days classroom training vary widely depending upon the scheme. The primary qualification is NVQ level 2 in amenity horticulture although a number of councils are supplementing this with other training. Most schemes include an element of rotation with some working hard to give students a wide range of experiences. The broad variation in schemes and how they are structured make it hard to identify general good practice as no group of features seems to determine a positive outcome. Best practice is therefore most usefully presented through councils who are satisfied with their schemes who have modified their schemes to meet specific needs. Appendix 3 contains case studies.

7. Conclusions

The following is a full list of conclusions.

59% of North West Councils responded to the questionnaire and therefore the results are representative of the region. 27 Council's responded.

Findings on apprenticeship schemes are limited to only thirteen authorities but give an insight into schemes across the region.

14 of the responding authorities do not have apprenticeship schemes, however nine are considering establishing a scheme, and five are not.

- Of these 14 funding was sited as the barrier establishing a scheme by 8.

13 respondents do have schemes with potential to employ 49 apprentices.

- Recruitment to these varies as does duration; 6 last 3 years, 4 two years. Six could guarantee jobs for apprentices at the end of the scheme but seven could not.
- Training over the year takes 52 classroom days for 5 authorities and 40 days for four; others have 12 or less classroom days. Ten lead to NVQ level 2 and three to level 3.
- It was difficult to establish a typical salary cost for apprentices as these ranged between just under £3000 to £15500 dependant on age and qualification. And the costs for running schemes were between £6000 and £20,000, most of which was met by the Learning Skills Council.

25 apprentices responded from 9 organisations two of which did not submit a manager's response. All of these were enthusiastic liked their apprenticeship scheme and the learning. Dislikes were local issues such as travel expenses and rotation planning.

- 21 out of the 25 respondents wanted to continue working in parks liking the variation in the job most.

50 delegated from apprentice managers, funding organisations and training providers attended the Apprenticeship Seminar therefore outcomes from this are representative.

- All discussion groups agreed that funding, salaries, recruitment and retention as key challenges. The lack of revenue funding in the sector was deemed as the greatest challenge with one group highlighting the unpredictability of the service in relation to staff and budget cuts.
- The image of the sector was agreed to be a limiting factor that potentially marketing campaigns and wider 'environmental' learning could respond to.
- Training courses were sited as a challenge with three groups identifying a need to clarify and manage progression route. It was felt better co-ordination of the opportunities and information linked to careers was needed. Information available to managers on this is limited.

- Three groups liked the flexibility of the NVQ however three also thought the qualification was too easy and that a pass mark would help distinguish between candidates and their desire to work in the sector.
- A number of improvements were suggested such as other complementary training, continual assessments, accommodation of seasonal influences on components and subjects to include.

8. Summary and Planned Actions

There is positive support for apprenticeship schemes across the North West with enthusiasm to develop and improve these by overcoming some of the challenges and providing a more cohesive career structure for the sector and apprenticeships within it.

General consensus agrees apprenticeships are the way forward to bring new people into the sector, however recruitment drives are needed.

The Training and Skills Working group has developed the recommended way forward from the Apprenticeship seminar (5.3.3) and identified the following progression.

To progress Apprenticeships'

- Link with review by Lantra.
- Discuss NVQ in detail as employer needs.
- Find good places for the 20 apprentices in 2008 (3 going to Bolton).
- Identify formal training and development of apprentice's career path.
- Provide LSC with career paths linked with GreenSpace's GreenSkill and Lantra's Course Finder on line tools.
- Provide Lantra with formal education needs for providers and Lantra to develop.
- Identify mechanisms of delivery.
- Provide recruitment drive.
- Link with new into diploma to land based studies/ employment.

To progress a new course to meet the skills not covered by courses/ providers

- identify from "Land based Review" all courses and skill gaps against previous work.
- identify through the National Occupation Framework what courses need adjusted and where new course would fit in.
- develop new course with Lantra to be securely funded by the Learning Skills Council prior to LSC ending in 2010.
- link with national initiatives and emerging work.

A Skills Partnership would be for employers/ local authorities to come together to mentor and develop individuals where gaps exist prior to formal training being finalised to cover this. The Training and Skills Working Group identified this potential solution to help with non formal training, sharing best practice and supporting supervisors of apprentices. The GreenSpace North West website would be the Partnership's network and information source. For Mentoring schemes the partnership will include those employers who have made Skills Pledge and parks services who have the capacity, proximity and right people in place to run an "employee exchange" (an idea of the group some time ago) Employees may swap for days/ weeks/ months to learn and share experiences. Aim to link with training providers to develop a series of one day training courses across the year. This could be either in community skills for rangers, one of the technical certificates under NVQ e.g. Manual handling; or understanding/ doing risk assessments for example.

The Training and Skills Working Group relies upon the commitment, enthusiasm and volunteered time of individuals across the North West. To deliver the progression of improved training, skill development and in particular recruitment to the sector the Group needs greater capacity and more members from all organisations. The first priority for the Group is to tackle this and try to ensure employers take the opportunity to influence the sector's training and employment opportunities. In addition by involving providers in the group it is hoped that together providers will meet the needs of employers and address the

very real skill gaps. The group aspire to providers going beyond employer involvement limited to well established course provisions to establish courses and training that is flexible to accommodate needs along side jobs and career paths.

The under pinning principle of the Group's activity is to link the work from the region at a national and strategic level to ensure employment and skill development delivers quality public parks and green spaces that support communities, investment, health and education.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Apprentice managers survey
- Appendix 2 Apprentice Survey
- Appendix 3 Case studies
 - Copeland Borough Council
 - Halton Metropolitan Borough Council

GreenSpace North West Survey of Apprenticeship Schemes

The report *Skills and Training in the North West's Green Spaces* identified wide variation in green space apprenticeship schemes in the region and also that a number of you would like to improve your schemes. The Training Working Group is therefore running a [seminar](#) on 9th February 2007 to look at apprenticeship schemes in more detail.

This questionnaire aims to gather more detailed information to identify areas for action and inform debate at the seminar. We would be grateful if you could return this questionnaire as soon as possible before January 19th, **even if you do not have a scheme or are not attending the seminar**. Please return to:

Ros Johnson, GreenSpace North West, C/o Parks & Recreation, Stockport MBC, Stopford House, Stockport, SK1 3XE. Tel: 0161 474 4421 fax: 0161 474 4476 ros.johnson@stockport.gov.uk

SECTION 1: Contact details

Name: _____

Job Title: _____

Organisation: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____ Tel: _____

Address:

SECTION 2: Background Information

2.1 Do you run a horticultural / green-space apprenticeship scheme? This includes schemes managed by contractors on your behalf. Yes No

If yes go to section 3; if no complete section 2 and return the form.

2.2 Are you thinking of setting up an apprenticeship scheme? Yes No

2.3 Please describe any barriers you have establishing an apprenticeship scheme.

SECTION 3: Structure of the scheme

3.1 What is your total number of apprentices? _____

3.2 How frequently do you recruit apprentices? e.g. 1 per year _____

3.3 How long does your apprenticeship scheme last (years)? _____

3.4 How many days formal classroom training per year by in house trainers or external providers? _____

3.5 Is the training provided expected to lead to a qualification? Yes No

3.6 If yes, what is the qualification? _____

- 3.7 Are you satisfied with the skills and training the qualification provides? Yes No
- 3.8 What organisation provides the training for your scheme? _____
- 3.9 Do your apprentices complete an Individual Training Plan – where learning objectives are set with the apprentice ahead of the programme? Yes No
- 3.10 Briefly describe any other features of your scheme e.g. rotations, external placements or management through external contractors

SECTION 4: Funding

- 4.1 What is the annual salary of an apprentice? _____
- 4.2 What is the expected annual cost of an apprentice? _____
- 4.3 Who funds the training? e.g. Learning Skills Council _____
- 4.4 Who funds the apprentice’s salary? e.g. revenue budget _____
- 4.5 Does the funding for formal training limit the apprentices you can attract? Yes No
- 4.6 If yes, what are the funding barriers? e.g. age criteria / training providers.

SECTION 5: Outcomes

- 5.1 What are your objectives in providing an apprenticeship scheme?
- 5.2 Are you satisfied that your scheme meets these objectives? Yes No
- 5.3 Please give reasons for your answer to 5.2.
- 5.4 Approx what percentage apprentices recruited complete the scheme? _____
- 5.5 Do you guarantee a full time job on completion of the apprenticeship? Yes No
- 5.6 Approx what percentage apprentices recruited go on to full time employment? _____
- 5.7 How would you like the Forum to help you improve your apprenticeship scheme?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Survey of Apprentices Working in Parks and Green Spaces

North West local authorities are working together to find out what makes a good apprenticeship scheme and they need you to tell us what you think about the scheme you are on. It would be very useful if you could complete this form and return it as soon as possible before January 19th to:

Ros Johnson, GreenSpace North West, C/o Parks & Recreation, Stockport MBC, Stopford House, Stockport, SK1 3XE.

Tel: 0161 474 4421

fax: 0161 474 4476

email ros.johnson@stockport.gov.uk

Name: _____

Organisation: _____

Do you feel that you have been taught how to do the job? Yes No Maybe

Would you like to continue working in parks after your apprenticeship? Yes No Maybe

Are you enjoying your apprenticeship? Yes No Maybe

What did you like about your apprenticeship scheme?

What did you dislike about your apprenticeship scheme and how could it be improved?


Case Study 1 Copeland Borough Council Presentation



COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Horticultural Trainees


Slide 1



Background

- Performance Review - Grounds Maintenance (Internal) January 2001
 - Merging of the Client and Contractors Section
 - An ageing workforce
 - Need to develop an appropriate training package to address potential skill shortages and career development.


Slide 2



Background

- Audit Commission Best Value Review November 2001
 - Ageing Workforce – Whilst service management recognises this is an issue, it was not being treated as an immediate priority. In our view the service will find it difficult to recruit, train and retain younger staff.

Slide 3



Background

- Audit Commission Best Value Review November 2001
 - Skills – We found little evidence of securing future skills and experience. We found no evidence of a well developed, costed programme to address the need to recruit, develop and retain sufficient horticultural qualified staff.

Slide 4



Background

- Merging of the Client and Contractors Sections
 - Restructuring - Management Layer
 - Financial Savings
 - Support 3 Horticultural Apprentices
 - 2002
 - 4 year contracts
 - Leading to a Horticultural Qualification

Slide 5



Background

- Qualification Options
 - NVQ's
- UCLAN – Newton Rigg University
 - David Haigh – Principle Horticultural Lecturer
 - City & Guilds Art of Gardening – 5 Modules
 - 1. Tree, Shrubs and Hedges
 - 2. Plant Propagation
 - 3. Organic Gardening
 - 4. Ponds and Water Features
 - 5. Garden Design



Slide 6

Qualification



- Career Development
 - National Certificate In Horticulture
 - National Diploma In Horticulture



Slide 7

Qualification



- National Certificate
 - Principles of Plant and Soil Science
 - Design Principles
 - Landscape Construction
 - Machinery Operations
 - Horticultural Skills & Plant Knowledge
 - Business Management
 - Organic Horticulture
 - Plant Establishment
 - Plant Propagation
 - Plant Use & Knowledge
 - Rock & water Gardens
 - Specialist Project Studies
- National Diploma
 - Industrial Experience
 - Decorative Horticulture
 - Ecology & Conservation
 - Estate Skills
 - Garden Design & Graphics
 - Turf Production & Maintenance

Slide 8


Placements



- Career Development
 - 6-8 Weeks (Travel & Accommodation)
 - Liverpool Botanic Gardens
 - Cheltenham Parks Department (Nursery)
 - Rydal Hall (National Trust)
 - Brockhole (Lakeland Centre)
 - Lakeland Horticultural Society (LHS – Windermere)

Slide 9

Outcomes



- Current position
 - Two apprentices recently recruited into fulltime positions
 - The other apprentice left to take up horticultural position in New Zealand
- Recruiting replacements

Slide 10

Outcomes



- Awards
 - APSE Horticultural Trainee of the Year
 - Cumbria Show – Gold Award
 - Supported Green Flag Awards
 - Supported Britain In Bloom Awards
 - Supported North Excellence Business Awards (EFQM) Finalist two years running and achieved Best Customer Results Award

Slide 11

Thank You

Slide 12

Case Study 2 Halton Borough Council
Presentation (Enlarge to view slides)



Slide 1



Slide 2



Slide 3



Slide 4



Slide 5



Slide 6

