

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cyllid](#) ar [Cyllideb Ddrafft Llywodraeth Cymru 2025-26](#).

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Consultation on Welsh Government's Draft Budget Proposals for 2025-26

From: Daniel Lock, Director, Nature Service Wales

Date: 28th November 2024

Subject: Written Evidence for Consultation on Draft Budget Proposals 2025-26

To the Clerk of the Finance Committee,

Nature Service Wales welcomes the opportunity to provide input on the Welsh Government's Draft Budget Proposals for 2025-26. As a growing national movement uniting organisations, initiatives, and citizens in nature recovery, Nature Service Wales is well positioned to help create a greener economy that is resilient, inclusive, and equipped to meet the urgent challenges posed by the Nature and Climate Emergencies.

Our response addresses some of the specific questions in the consultation letter and highlights how Nature Service Wales can be a vehicle for delivering on key budget priorities – building capacity across Wales to restore our natural environment and build climate resilience, while unlocking the potential for nature-based jobs and empowering citizens from all backgrounds with the skills, knowledge, and motivation to contribute.

The observations and recommendations below are based largely on our partnership network's insight and research, which has contributed to developing Nature Service Wales. For example, the potential for nature-based job creation is illustrated by research carried out by economist Matt Rayment for RSPB Cymru, '*Developing a Green Workforce in Wales: Estimating the Scale of Need and Opportunity*' 2020:

Green Job Creation Potential in Wales (10 years)

Type of Investment	Employment
Restoration and creation of priority habitats	1,000
Restoration and creation of boundary features	1,151
Environmental land management advice	87
Improving and creating urban green spaces	500
Planting additional woodlands for net zero carbon	167
Biodiversity net gain	114
Control of invasive non-native species	20
Nature conservation surveys, monitoring and evaluation	20
Nature based tourism development plan	3,875
Total	6,934

Matt Rayment for RSPB Cymru, 2020 'Developing a Green Workforce in Wales: Estimating the Scale of Need and Opportunity'



There are also well recognised barriers to realising this potential – and to delivering the wider economic and social benefits, while addressing the Nature and Climate Emergencies in general – on which we give more detail below.

We offer the following observations and recommendations in response to some of the consultation questions, while urging Welsh Government to support Nature Service Wales as a key partner in delivering the ambitions:

1. Clarity and ambition of plans to build a greener economy

We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to a greener economy and urge the strongest possible ambition. A healthy natural environment has historically been viewed as a luxury, and an unfortunate but necessary casualty of economic development. The Nature and Climate Emergencies have shown just how misguided that approach was. We are increasingly aware that a healthy and functioning natural environment is the bedrock of healthy economies and fundamental to societal resilience. As such it should be viewed in line with national security. We recommend:

- **Integration of nature recovery across policy areas:** Embedding nature recovery as a central pillar in economic strategies will not only address environmental degradation and build climate resilience, but also create sustainable employment opportunities and improve health outcomes. Establishing a cross-departmental Nature Service Wales project board across Welsh Government would support collaboration and maximise the impact. This should include a review to identify how existing funding streams can be used more effectively to incorporate nature-based skills development opportunities, ensuring they are embedded in government-funded training and employment programmes.
- **Clear pathways for citizen engagement:** Establishing and promoting more extensive, visible and accessible avenues for individuals to participate in nature restoration opportunities – including skills, learning and career pathways – will enhance public involvement and support for environmental goals. We know from research carried out by our partners that this is what young people (16 – 25-year-olds) are asking for to enable engagement with the sector. See below.

2. Investment targeted at tackling the Climate Change and Nature Emergency

Nature Service Wales is ready to mobilise its partnerships, networks and momentum to scale the impact of investment in Wales's natural environment. While we acknowledge the significant current pressures on government funding, we also recognise that a healthy and functioning natural environment is the foundation of our economy and our collective wellbeing. Wales is the nation that pioneered the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, but paradoxically also one of the most nature-depleted countries in

the world. We believe the same level of ambition that created the WFG Act should drive Wales to become a global leader in nature restoration.

As the recent open letter from the Wales Environment Link demonstrates, momentum for Nature Service Wales is growing across the private, public, and voluntary sectors, and now is the time to translate this into practical action. With Welsh Government's support, Nature Service Wales can be a transformative force in achieving the green jobs and nature restoration ambitions that are so important for Wales's future. We propose:

- **Support and investment for Nature Service Wales (NSW):**
We request Welsh Government's commitment to investing in the long-term potential of Nature Service Wales, enabling the establishment of a national framework for nature-based skills and job opportunities across Wales. As a strategic partner, Welsh Government's support for Strand 1 of NSW's business plan – focused on building a small core team and delivery framework – will be crucial in securing further funding, including private sector investment.
- **Increased funding for skills development:** Allocating more resources to training and engagement programmes focused on nature recovery and nature-based solutions that build climate resilience. This will help to create the necessary workforce and capacity to meet environmental ambitions.
- **Raise public awareness of the Nature Emergency and the role of nature restoration in tackling the climate crisis:** Lack of public awareness is a critical barrier to delivering meaningful action on the Nature and Climate Emergencies. While the Climate Emergency is increasingly well understood, solutions can often feel inaccessible to many. In contrast, the Nature Emergency remains frequently overlooked, despite being equally critical. Nature-based solutions can address both the nature and climate crises, while offering more accessible pathways for citizens of all backgrounds to engage meaningfully. Investment should prioritise initiatives that highlight these multiple-benefit solutions and their connection to climate mitigation and adaptation, galvanising public engagement and ensuring that nature recovery becomes a shared national effort.

3. Addressing potential skill gaps

To deliver green jobs for nature restoration, economic growth and climate resilience, Wales requires a workforce equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and expertise. Investing in nature-based skills and career pathways would build the capacity needed for current and future delivery while further unlocking the potential of the green economy.



There is widespread recognition of the need to address skills and capacity gaps in delivering green jobs for nature restoration and nature-based solutions. This was highlighted in the Welsh Government's Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendations, as well as in other recent research, such as that published in CIEEM's *Opening up vocational pathways into nature-based green jobs* report, by Neil Smith and Dr Alina Congreve, November 2023. This research, commissioned by CIEEM and Lantra and carried out by Resources for Change Ltd. found that the ecology sector faces a significant capacity and skills challenge:

'Most employers reported serious difficulties in filling vacancies and finding people with the right skills. They thought graduates and postgraduates were missing many of the most important skills ecologists need. In particular, species identification, land management, and practical field skills. Employers also want people with soft skills, who can communicate with non-ecologists.'

The research also found that the capacity crisis is largely unquantified:

'Despite consensus on the capacity crisis, there is no concrete data to quantify the extent of the current problem. There is also no robust attempt to quantify future demand for ecology skills as we scale-up climate change adaptation. Lacking a coordinated strategy to align education and training with demand, makes it difficult to explain, plan for, or garner wider support.'

The CIEEM report also highlights that one way to address the skills gap is to improve pathways into ecology jobs for young people. However, separate research carried out by Jo McGreal and Jacky Cox Consultancy for RSPB Cymru, 2021 '*A National Nature Service for Wales: what good looks like*' found that there is very limited awareness among young people (16 – 25 years old) of the nature sector in general, although once made aware they would like to know more. This lack of awareness means the sector and the range of opportunities are not within their sphere of consideration. The research showed this lack of awareness is also apparent in young people's support networks, which means it is not even an aspiration. Those engaged in the research started with limited interest in the sector, but once engaged and made aware of the opportunities, interest rose significantly. In general, young people reported that they would like to be supported to access the opportunities the sector can provide. There is therefore the need to engage young people – and citizens in general – more broadly, raising the profile of the nature sector and the work involved, while creating more extensive, visible and accessible opportunities for involvement.

Nature Service Wales is being developed to directly address these issues, and again we urge Welsh Government's support for the movement as a means to delivering the ambitions.

Following from the above, we would also like to highlight the need to:



- **Conduct insight research to quantify existing and future skills gaps for delivering nature restoration and climate resilience outcomes:** Ensure training and skills development opportunities align with current and emerging workforce demands.
- **Invest in nature-based skills and training opportunities:** Support initiatives that promote and foster more visible, accessible and cohesive education and training programmes and opportunities, that equip individuals with practical skills and experience, while embedding eco-literacy across all sectors to build a workforce capable of addressing the Nature and Climate Emergencies.

4. Representation of preventative spending in resource allocations

Preventative spending is particularly fundamental in addressing the interconnected challenges of the Nature and Climate Emergencies. Investment in nature-based solutions, awareness-raising, environmental education and skills development tackles root causes, builds capacity for future delivery, reduces future costs and delivers long-term benefits for people, communities and the environment. Such investment not only helps prevent further environmental degradation but also mitigates the impacts of climate change, improves public health outcomes and builds resilience across society. We urge:

- **Investment in nature-based solutions and the skills pipelines required to deliver them, as a cornerstone of preventative spending:** Nature-based solutions provide multiple long-term benefits, including enhancing biodiversity, mitigating the increasingly dangerous effects of climate change, and preventing poor health outcomes by improving mental and physical wellbeing through access to nature. Investment in these solutions – and crucially in the skills and engagement pipelines needed to implement them – addresses root causes of environmental and societal challenges, while reducing the future financial burden on healthcare, infrastructure, climate adaptation and environmental restoration.
- **Investment in environmental education and skills development as a foundation for addressing the Nature and Climate Emergencies:** Environmental education is essential for building the knowledge, understanding and capacity needed to deliver nature recovery and nature-based solutions that address biodiversity loss, mitigate the causes and effects of climate change and enhance health and wellbeing. Investing in eco-literacy while creating more accessible skills and career pathways in nature recovery would help empower citizens of all backgrounds to take meaningful action. This is also preventative investment, equipping current and future generations with the tools to manage

and adapt to the ongoing crises while reducing societal and economic costs of inaction.

Nature Service Wales stands ready to be a strategic partner to Welsh Government in delivering key budget priorities and green economy ambitions, while working to ensure that Wales becomes a global leader in nature recovery, in line with its pioneering commitment to the Wellbeing of Future Generations.

We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations and look forward to working with Welsh Government to build a greener, more prosperous and resilient future for all.

Thank you for considering our input.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Lock,

Director, Nature Service Wales