

Coordination needed to support green-fingered youths

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The project, which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), found that many young volunteers travelled long distances from cities to short-term projects in rural areas and felt they were being punished for being disruptive or naughty at school. They saw the conservation work as having no relevance to their future employment, or educating them on green issues.

'The problem lies in the mismatch between youth services and environmental education,' says Dr Michael Leyshon, who led the project. 'Environmental conservation is largely organised by people with a background in [environmental science](#), but no training in youth work and youth workers have no training in conservation. The result is that young people and the environment both lose out. We need more coordination in the voluntary sector and an effective interface with youth services.'

Dr Leyshon acknowledges that many young people do volunteer because they are enthusiastic about conservation, but he says that environmental skills should not be seen in isolation. 'There is a need for more certificated courses, in a variety of 'rural' skills, such as those run by the National Trust. But we also need to think more holistically, and try to connect skills-building with supporting local transport, training and business support as part of an overall regeneration policy.'

The report says that properly managed volunteer work in conservation could offer young people the opportunity to live and work locally. Latest figures suggest that each year 100,000 young people are leaving rural

areas of England.

'Managing the countryside for the purposes of environmental sustainability is one of the few sectors of the rural economy that can offer the soft skills, like the ability to work in a team as well as the practical skills that could be useful in many other kinds of jobs,' Dr Leyshon explains. 'Environmental projects should be part of mainstream education, not somewhere for excluded kids and youth offenders to take a bit of exercise in a "green gym".'

Source: Economic & Social Research Council ([news](#) : [web](#))

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