LEARNING ABOUT LAND
Skills, training and employment for land-based social enterprises
Shared Assets is a think and do tank that supports people managing land for the common good. At Shared Assets we believe that land is a common resource that should deliver shared benefits for everyone. We provide practical advice, support and training to landowners and communities who want to manage land as a sustainable and productive asset. We also undertake research, policy and advocacy work to help create an environment where common good models of land management can flourish.

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Table of contents

Introduction 3

Training to work in a land-based social enterprise 4
   Skills for land-based social enterprises: what’s needed? 4
   How do people train to work in land-based social enterprises? 5
   Types of training available to the land-based social enterprise sector 5
   Available pathways to employment 6
   Case studies: Available training for the land-based social enterprise sector 6

Problems with current training and employment pathways 8

Some key solutions 9

What will Shared Assets do? 10

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Introduction

Making land work requires many skills. Without developing a diverse range of key skills, land-based social enterprises will be unable to fulfill their missions. Access to suitable training, and clear pathways to land-based careers, are crucial to common good land use. Unfortunately, in many cases these are not forthcoming. This briefing aims to summarise the existing situation, to identify space for improvements, and to introduce and justify our strategy for improving the situation. It should be useful to current and aspiring land-based social entrepreneurs, people designing land-based trainings, and anyone who has an interest in supporting them.

Land-based social enterprises are organisations that use land to create social and environmental value, whilst also generating income through trade or delivering services. Land-based social enterprises have great potential to provide fulfilling and fair land-based work. However at the moment, it is difficult for people to develop secure livelihoods and careers through land-based social enterprise. This is both because of a lack of structured training and work pathways, and because of wider structural issues.

This briefing provides an overview of the skills needed to work in or lead a land-based social enterprise, how people commonly go about gaining and developing those skills, and the problems and solutions that emerge from this.

Glossary

**Land-based social enterprise**: an organisation that uses land to create social and environmental value, whilst also generating income through trade or delivering services. Read and watch videos about some examples of land-based social enterprises.

**Groups, businesses, projects**: Land-based social enterprises come in different shapes and sizes. Sometimes, they are charities, other times they are private sector organisations. We use terms like groups, businesses or projects interchangeably to refer to land-based social enterprises and their activities.

**Practitioners**: People who work for or lead land-based social enterprises.

**Land-based social entrepreneurs / leaders**: People who have founded or hold leadership positions in land-based social enterprises.

**Land-based workers**: People employed in the land-based sector.
Training to work in a land-based social enterprise

Skills for land-based social enterprises: what’s needed?

Land-based social enterprises need to host a wide range of skills to run sustainable businesses and deliver their social missions. The businesses we have worked with have often displayed a remarkably wide range of skills. Indeed we see this as a key strength of the land-based social enterprise sector, borne out of passionate workers and the need for innovation in a tough climate. However, we have also observed some important gaps that require consideration.

People who work in land-based social enterprises need a wide range of skills. Below is a list of some of the most important:

- **Land-based skills:** Practitioners need skills to properly manage the land they work with. This might be food growing, forestry or green space management. This can vary a great deal based on the type of land, the approach to land management, and the circumstances. For example some will require expertise in using machinery whilst others will require detailed knowledge of ecosystems. The extent to which specific technical skills are found in land-based social enterprises tends to be dependent on the backgrounds of those involved. Particular deficits are found in the most specialised areas, for example traditional forestry skills.

- **Business skills:** They must be able to contribute to the running of a successful business. This means skills in some or all of business planning, project management, marketing, administration, finances, IT, trading, governance and more.

- **People skills:** Land-based enterprises are often highly dependent on partnership building and community engagement to achieve their objectives. Practitioners must be strong communicators and networkers - forging and developing relationships internally and externally, sharing skills, and building local connections.

As well as a combination of the above, people who decide to set up and lead such organisations need the following skills:

- **Leadership and management:** People who lead land-based social enterprise need to be good leaders and motivators, as they will often be managing teams with diverse skillsets and needs.

- **Strategy and business development:** They must also have the creativity needed to design and realise innovative and enterprising models. Some land-based social enterprise workers come to land management with excellent business skills.
However enterprises can fall down on basic but crucial things like cash flow and pricing, even where they have excellent models for managing the land.

- **Other specialist knowledge:** Land-based entrepreneurs need to develop expertise around various issues they encounter. This might be accessing land, negotiating the planning system, developing projects or seeking funding. It means understanding arrangements like tax, subsidies, the policy environment and other legislative requirements. Depending on the project, they may also require skills in counselling, coaching and / or teaching. Again, developing this knowledge can be a challenge for many groups who are focused on developing their sites and growing their businesses.

**How do people train to work in land-based social enterprises?**

People who want to set up or work for a land-based social enterprise often ‘just do it’, without going through any specific training process. However the lack of certain skills can cause projects to fail. To prevent this, practitioners may seek training on the basis of needs they identify.

The ad-hoc nature of training for land-based social enterprises makes it hard to design and resource training provision. There might be experienced land managers who want to develop their business skills. Alternatively many trainees need to develop their land management skills, and some need training in both land management and business. People also seek land-based training at different points in their careers.

**Types of training available to the land-based social enterprise sector**

A wide variety of training models are available, partly in response to the diversity of routes into this kind of work. The following are some rough groupings of the kinds of training available to people pursuing livelihoods in land-based social enterprises. Often, training can be provided as a mix of the following typologies.

- **Volunteer training:** Many land-based social entrepreneurs make volunteers a key part of both their business models and missions. This enables volunteers to develop new skills, but some cannot afford to take unpaid positions.

- **Formal or informal apprenticeships and on-the-job learning:** The future landworker works on a site with a more experienced land manager, helping them work whilst also learning from them. The lack of quality apprenticeships, and paid on-the-job experience, is seen as a gap in almost all the areas we’ve looked at.

- **Supported/starter projects:** It is extremely difficult for new entrants to get to the stage where they can access land and run a viable project. Some training aims to help here by providing access to a site and support to get started on it. They also help install the new entrants into existing networks, and to build supportive peer relationships between them. This training is largely dependent on grant support.
• **Traditional land based colleges:** A number of colleges across the country offer courses in land management of various kinds, however they tend to be focused on more traditional approaches to land management and not many of the groups we work with tend to be involved in them.

• **Training on particular aspects of running a project:** Other trainings are aimed at tackling particular skills deficits, for example an approach to land management, or a business focused course like improving marketing. These are more likely to be one off trainings or shorter courses.

**Available pathways to employment**

It is not enough to consider skills training alone. Rather we need to understand pathways towards achieving livelihoods after training. There is no one straightforward set of training and work experience that leads to a career in land-based social enterprise. Some of the pathways we have observed include:

• People go on to work in land-based social enterprises as employees

• People starting up their own projects immediately

• People moving on to other related sectors, for example landscape management, community development or education.

• People starting projects after working in other related fields

**Case studies: Available training for the land-based social enterprise sector**

**Hill Holt Wood apprenticeship scheme**

*Hill Holt Wood* is a woodland social enterprise in Lincolnshire. It runs apprenticeship schemes where young people learn land-based skills in both forestry and horticulture. Apprentices acquire knowledge about woodland conservation as well as more practical skills such as chainsaw handling.

**Organic Lea - volunteers, apprenticeship and certified training**

*OrganicLea* is a food growing social enterprise. It works with volunteers and school students, offers apprenticeships, and delivers City and Guilds certified units in horticulture, garden enterprise, and food growing. It also runs one off sessions on things like building wind turbines, and mushroom cultivation.
Cordwainers Grow - Grow a Gardener

Grow a Gardener is a project set up by Cordwainers Grow to help local people learn how to set up and manage a community garden. The course involves practical and theoretical guidance combined with one-to-one mentoring. Training topics include: designing and building your space, legal issues, networking, fundraising, community engagement.

Growing Together

Growing Together is a partnership initiative of community and environmental sector organisation that aims to unlock income, land and skills for community food growing groups to become financially self-sustaining. They provide one-off workshops about topics like crowdfunding, community shares, marketing, e-commerce, business planning and financial governance.

Kindling Trust’s FarmStart

Kindling Trust is a food growing social enterprise. Their ‘FarmStart’ programme (funded by Esmee Fairbairn Foundation) involves giving participants a small piece of land and supporting them to grow food for market.
Problems with current training and employment pathways

Unfortunately, in many cases training and pathways to employment do not meet the needs of current or prospective land-based social entrepreneurs. Four broad issues prevent this from happening:

- **Wider issues of land-based work**: Land-based work as a whole faces two main mutually reinforcing issues. Firstly, there is a structural issue: working conditions are often poor, for example where work is only seasonal or temporary. This, coupled with the way land-based careers are perceived means that not enough people aspire to do this type of work. Unless we improve how land-based careers are valued and perceived, people will not want to pursue them, let alone train for them.

- **Issues with training for land-based social enterprises**: Training specific to land-based social enterprises is not readily available. People generally gain the many skills needed by the sector in a fragmented and unstructured way. There is no single course combining all the skills required by the sector.

- **Inability to afford training**: Whilst subsidies are available for courses, many prospective participants struggle to pay course fees. Additionally, much of the support for training is aimed at 18-24 year olds, which excludes older prospective social entrepreneurs and land-based workers, who make up a large proportion of the total. Especially since training is unlikely to lead to highly paid work, fees can be a major barrier.

- **Training and pathways to livelihoods are unclear**: Even where suitable training is available, a common problem is a lack of opportunities to develop a livelihood with the newly acquired skills. Land-based work encompasses such a diverse group of jobs, aspirations and models, that it is difficult to establish a single progression route.
Some key solutions

Addressing the issues above will require action both within the land-based social enterprise sector and at a wider policy level. We suggest the following actions:

- **Supporting land-based social enterprises to integrate training into their business models**: Land-based social enterprises are well placed to provide holistic training including technical, business and people skills. They can offer fulfilling training opportunities for those wanting to work in the land-based sector, while also giving land-based social enterprises an opportunity to network and develop their business models.

- **Better policy relating to land-based work**: Some of the problems of land-based work and training could be addressed through policy change. There is an opportunity, particularly post-Brexit, to re-evaluate policy relating to land-based work. Government policies should value and support the delivery and development of land-based skills through funding, subsidies and other policy measures.

- **Creating coherent training and employment pathways**: Partnerships within the land-based sector can create opportunities for more coherent training and employment pathways. This could take the form of well-structured career-development pathways and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes. Joint working between diverse enterprises could be particularly beneficial. For example, collaboration between horticulture and forestry enterprises could help provide permanent rather than seasonal work and training, combining the best elements of both sectors.

- **Making land-based careers aspirational**: Currently land-based work is not commonly aspired to. Working more closely with the education system could help change this perception. Careers in land-based social enterprise involve innovation, entrepreneurialism and the delivery of social and environmental benefits. People need to know this.
What will Shared Assets do?

- **Identify and share best practice in training.** We will use our connections to land-based social enterprise to identify and publicise which types of training work best and are most appropriate for the sector’s needs.

- **Continue delivering training to land-based groups.** We have always provided training on governance and business models. Moving forward we will continue to offer this, and to look for ways of funding it for groups who can not afford to fund it themselves.

- **Policy and advocacy work.** We will work with other groups and policymakers to advocate for an enabling environment for land-based social enterprises. This is important because it will help address the UK’s serious land-based skills deficit, whilst enabling secure careers in land-based social enterprise.

- **Seek funding to pilot a ‘Common Good Land Use foundation course’.** The course will aim to provide participants with a holistic grounding in the key aspects of running a land-based social enterprise.

- **Support land-based social enterprises to develop training as a part of their business models.** Not only are these businesses best placed to provide training for their sector, but they can also serve a wide variety of related fields due to the wide range of skills they encompass.