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The Green Recovery Challenge Fund Round 2

Final Summative Report



Green Recovery Challenge Fund


Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Heritage
Fund

 Environment
Agency


NATURAL
ENGLAND

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1. List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
25YEP	25 Year Environment Plan
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CEA	Cost-Effectiveness Analysis
eNGO	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GRCF	Green Recovery Challenge Fund
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
MI	Monitoring Information
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NNR	National Nature Reserve
ONS	Office for National Statistics
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SIC	Standard Industrial Classification
SOC	Standard Occupational Classification
SOS-UK	Students Organising for Sustainability UK
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
UK BAP	UK Biodiversity Action Plan

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3. Executive Summary

3.1. Introduction

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) was an £80m fund, developed in response to COVID-19, to support nature recovery and conservation across England. The GRCF was a short-term, competitive fund that has kickstarted environmental renewal while creating and retaining thousands of jobs in England. Defra announced the formation of GRCF Round 1 with a £40m investment in June 2020. In November 2020, GRCF Round 2 (with an additional £40m investment) was announced via the Prime Minister's [Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution](#).

The GRCF supported a range of projects in restoring nature, using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change, and connecting people with the natural environment. Moreover, the GRCF sought to actively support and meet goals within the UK Government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) (25YEP) to enhance people's engagement with the natural world and improve the environment within a generation.

To ensure that delivery supported the 25YEP, all GRCF projects were required to deliver against one or more of the following three environmental themes:

1. Nature conservation and restoration: habitats, species and ecosystems,
2. Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate mitigation and adaptation, and
3. Connecting people with nature.

As the GRCF was created in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all projects were also asked to align with the GRCF's aims to:

- Support job creation and retention as well as skill development within the conservation sector and its supply chains, and
- Enhance the capacity and resilience of eNGOs in terms of their financial stability, assets, skills, capabilities, and governance.

The GRCF was delivered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (the Heritage Fund) in partnership with Defra, utilising both organisations' knowledge and expertise regarding the environmental sector, public engagement, and grant funding.

Furthermore, the GRCF was supported by the following arm's-length bodies: Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission.

3.2. The Evaluation

In February 2022, the Heritage Fund commissioned Wavehill to undertake an independent evaluation of Round 2 of the GRCF. The focus of this evaluation was on providing insight into the delivery and outcomes of Round 2 projects, learning lessons from the second cohort of projects.

The questions that the evaluation sought to answer include:

- What lessons have been learnt from delivering the Round 2 projects and what are their implications for future land and nature projects and investments?
This will include:
 - The opportunities and challenges presented for eNGOs by a successful application to the GRCF.
 - The influence of the external environment on projects (e.g. COVID-19 restrictions or the labour market).
- To what extent have the intended short-term outcomes of the GRCF been met through the second round of funding and, where comparisons are possible, how does this relate to findings from Round 1 of the GRCF?
- What legacy does the GRCF leave and how should Defra and partners continue to monitor the impact beyond the end of the programme?
- Has value for money been demonstrated in terms of the delivery of environmental, engagement and economic objectives during the second round of funding and for the programme overall? This includes:
 - How does the cost-effectiveness of the GRCF compare to that of other similar programmes?
 - Which sectors and occupations have benefitted from the implementation of the programme?
 - What is the geographical distribution of the benefits of the GRCF?

3.3. Nature Conservation and Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

Across the GRCF, conservation activities have directly benefitted 448,318ha and 1,159km of land across England. In GRCF Round 2, conservation activity has directly benefitted 122,318ha and 587km of land across 965 sites throughout England, including both habitat creation and restoration activity. These figures include the creation or restoration of habitats directly benefitting 104km of rivers and 57km of hedgerows.

Overall, 1,895 sites have benefitted from GRCF environmental actions across the programme. In total, 965 sites have benefitted environmentally from GRCF Round 2 activity, with 530 of these sites (55 per cent) including a habitat listed as a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Priority Habitat Descriptions, 2009). Fifteen per cent of sites (147/965 sites) included areas classed as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and eight per cent were classed as local wildlife sites.

As a direct result of GRCF funding, 1,708,520 trees were planted in England across 693 sites. As a direct result of GRCF Round 2, 54 projects have planted 616,811 trees. This action directly and considerably contributes to the UK Government's aim of having 12 per cent woodland cover across England by 2050 (as outlined in the 2021 England Trees Action Plan) to meet net zero targets.

Reflections from GRCF Round 2 projects through survey responses and focus groups suggest that they have delivered positive impacts on biodiversity, habitat quality, and ecosystem health across England. They have enhanced the projects' local natural environment, making it more resilient and better equipped to support a wide range of species.

Projects frequently reported that they have strengthened working relationships with a range of partners as a result of their project delivery, resulting in longer-term multi-stakeholder engagement in local nature activities, including partners such as landowners, local authorities, schools, and other local eNGOs.

Projects commonly reported that their activity has enabled them to collect and monitor more data than they have previously been able to do (e.g. through ecological surveys and baseline habitat assessments). This has allowed projects to better understand the initial state of habitats, landscapes, and species populations and measure their delivery progress.

3.4. Connecting People with Nature

Overall, 402,740 people have engaged with 25,036 events across the lifetime of the GRCF both in person and online. In Round 2, 244,340 people have engaged with 16,779 events in person and online. Events were held across England, with the South West accounting for 22 per cent of all events held (3,633/16,541 in-person events). However, the North West engaged the most people in in-person events, with 48,830 people engaged in person over the course of the projects (21 per cent). A high concentration of events and people in the South West and North West broadly aligns with the high number of sites in each region.

Notably, nine per cent (1,455/16,541 in-person events) targeted people from a deprived background or NEET, with a further six per cent (1,038/16,541 in-person events) targeting people with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

A wide range of infrastructure has been installed or improved through the GRCF. **On a programme level, Round 1 and Round 2 of the GRCF have installed 609 elements of infrastructure across 230 sites.** In Round 2, 50 projects detailed works carried out over 190 sites, totalling 416 elements of infrastructure. Improvement or installation of infrastructure includes 192km of footpaths, 37km of fences, and 8km of boardwalks. Table 4.14 details the type of infrastructure improved.

Reflecting on what had worked well when connecting people with nature, projects commonly reported that by undertaking a range of different activities, they were able to engage different people with different interests and needs, which resulted in projects gaining momentum in local areas.

Overall, findings suggest that whilst GRCF Round 2 has effectively contributed to the 25YEP's aim of broadly connecting people with nature, more time, resource and/or

guidance may have been needed to ensure that GRCF project delivery aligned with sector-wide efforts to engage new and diverse audiences.

3.5. Resilience and Employment

Overall, Round 1 and Round 2 of the GRCF have directly supported 1,529 jobs, equivalent to 1,053 FTE. In total, 876 jobs have been directly supported across GRCF Round 2 projects, equivalent to 580 FTE jobs. Of the 876 roles, nearly two thirds were created for GRCF Round 2 (550 roles or 63 per cent), 193 were existing roles protected from redundancy (22 per cent), and 133 roles involved partial support with full cost recovery (15 per cent).

Monitoring data show that 252 apprenticeship roles were created across the GRCF, accounting for 201 FTE. In Round 2, 183 apprenticeship roles were created, accounting for 138 FTE. When compared with sector-wide averages, GRCF Round 2 equalities data indicate that projects have only been able to support increased diversity within the sector in a limited way.

Through the project costs spent on goods and services, it is estimated that the GRCF programme has supported an additional 1,101 full-time indirect jobs. It is estimated that in Round 2, £34.7m was spent on goods and services, which have indirectly supported an additional 553 full-time jobs.

In total, 78 per cent of jobs that were created as part of the programme (including apprenticeships) have been retained in the environmental sector, estimating that Round 2 of the GRCF has created 428 jobs which have been retained in the environmental sector.

In final workshops, projects were positive about the impact that GRCF Round 2 has had on their own organisational capacity and resilience. Whilst it is unsurprising that GRCF monies increased capacity through the recruitment of new staff and the retainment of staff at risk of redundancy, projects also reported that GRCF Round 2 has enabled their organisation to diversify their service offer, secure funding via other funding streams, access new markets due to working on new sites, and approach project delivery in new ways.

In many cases, GRCF Round 2 project delivery has had a positive impact on eNGOs' reputations, as their successful delivery has produced an evidence base with which they can demonstrate their project successes and show that they lead on the delivery of large-scale projects.

3.6. Sustainability and Value for Money

Almost half of all surveyed GRCF Round 2 projects confirmed that they have secured additional funding to continue their project activities (47 per cent; 35/75), whilst the majority of other projects are still hoping to secure funding to maintain project delivery in the future. This is a positive finding because it confirms that some

aspects of GRCF project activity will continue beyond the lifetime of the funding. In total, projects have received an additional £6.7m in funding post-GRCF.

Overall, the programme offered good value for money, with high additionality of the funding, attracting considerable match funding and in-kind contributions, and a widespread impact of project activities.

4. Introduction

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) was an £80m fund seeking to support nature recovery and conservation across England. In June 2020, Defra announced the formation of GRCF Round 1 with a £40m investment. In November 2020, GRCF Round 2 (with an additional £40m investment) was announced via the Prime Minister's [Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution](#) to further support environmental renewal while creating and retaining a range of jobs in England. It was a short-term, competitive fund that kickstarted environmental renewal while creating and retaining thousands of jobs in England. The GRCF supported a range of projects in restoring nature, using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change, and connecting people with the natural environment.

With the climate crisis continuing to worsen (RSPB and the State of Nature Partnership, [State of Nature Report 2023](#)), the GRCF also sought to actively support and meet goals within the UK Government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) (25YEP) to enhance people's engagement with the natural world and improve the environment within a generation.

To ensure that delivery supported the 25YEP, all GRCF projects were required to deliver against one or more of the following three environmental themes:

1. Nature conservation and restoration: habitats, species and ecosystems,
2. Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate mitigation and adaptation, and
3. Connecting people with nature.

As the GRCF was created in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all projects were also asked to align with the GRCF's aims to:

- Support job creation and retention as well as skill development within the conservation sector and its supply chains, and
- Enhance the capacity and resilience of eNGOs in terms of their financial stability, assets, skills, capabilities, and governance.

Job retention and creation constitute key components of the GRCF, particularly for people aged between 16 and 24. Applicants were encouraged to apply to the government's Kickstart scheme, which pays 100 per cent of costs for six-month job placements and can be used as a source of partnership funding for projects.

The GRCF was delivered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (the Heritage Fund) in partnership with Defra, utilising both organisations' knowledge and expertise regarding the environmental sector, public engagement, and grant funding. Furthermore, the GRCF was supported by the following arm's-length bodies: Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission.

Overall, 159 projects were funded through the GRCF, with 69 projects funded in Round 1 and 90 projects in Round 2. This evaluation, predominantly focused on the 90 GRCF Round 2 projects, however, reports on both rounds where possible to

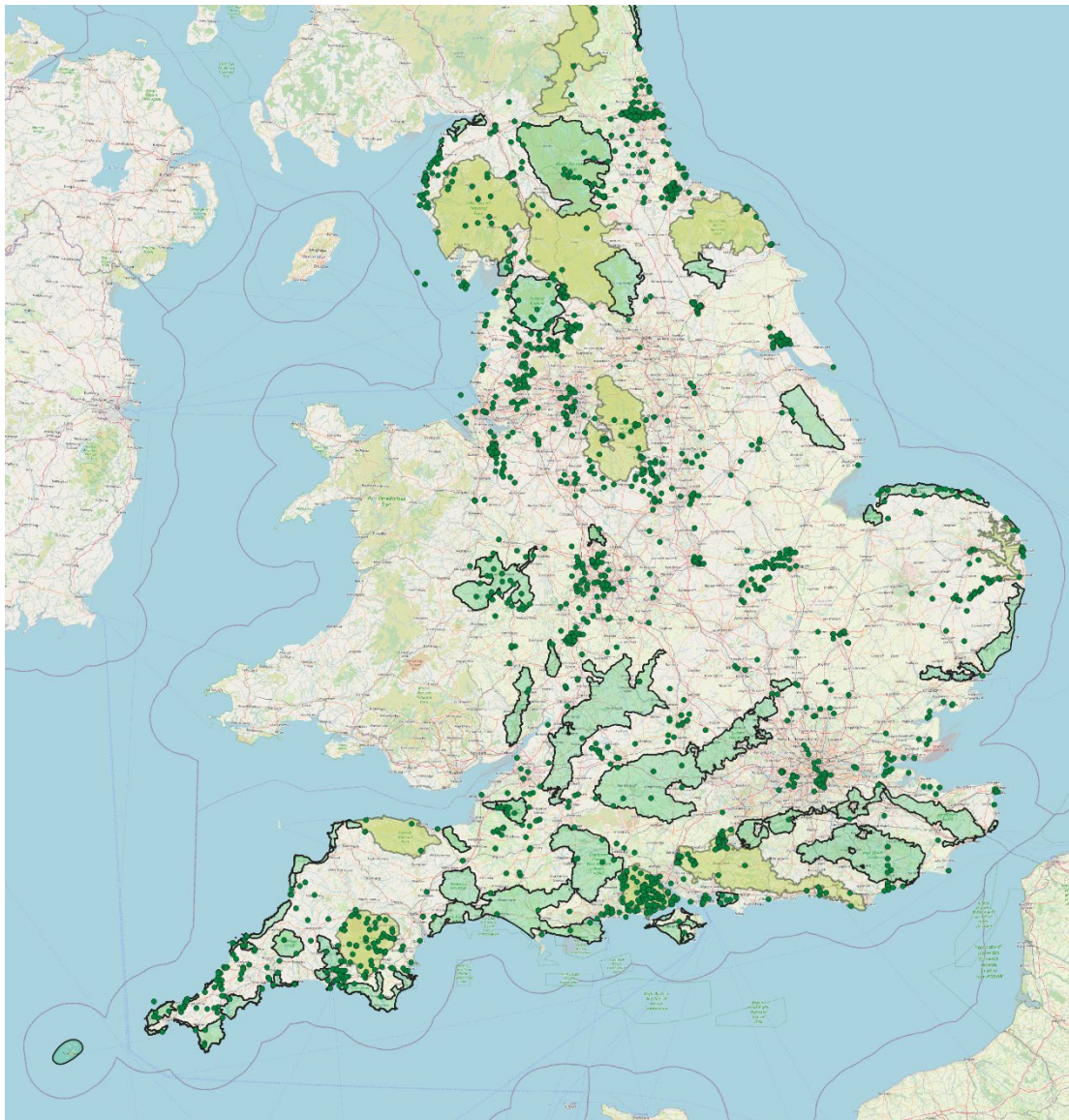
explore the broader reach and impact of the GRCF overall. The 159 GRCF projects worked across 3,286 sites, with 1,447 sites in Round 1 and 1,839 sites in Round 2. Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1 below illustrate the geographical distribution of sites across GRCF Round 2.

Table 1.1: Regional distribution of GRCF Round 2 sites

Region	Number of sites
North West	397
South East	295
North East	235
South West	233
West Midlands	223
East of England	184
Yorkshire and the Humber	120
East Midlands	100
London	52
Total	1,839

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=1,839 sites).

Figure 1.1: Map of Round 2 project sites with AONBs and National Parks



- All sites
- National Parks England
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=1,839 sites).

Please note that where maps are presented throughout this report, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are also displayed. This is intended to contextualise project reach and impact and illustrate project site placement alongside key areas of environmental importance across England.

1.1 The Evaluation

In February 2022, the Heritage Fund commissioned Wavehill to undertake an independent evaluation of Round 2 of the GRCF. The focus of this evaluation was on providing insight into the delivery and outcomes of Round 2 projects, learning lessons from the second cohort of projects.

The questions that the evaluation sought to answer include:

- What lessons have been learnt from delivering the Round 2 projects and what are their implications for future land and nature projects and investments?
This will include:
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 - How does the cost-effectiveness of the GRCF compare to that of other similar programmes?
 - Which sectors and occupations have benefitted from the implementation of the programme?
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5. Methodology

This section provides a brief outline of the approaches taken to fieldwork across the GRCF Round 2 evaluation which informed this final report.

The evaluation team completed the following fieldwork:

- Scoping workshops with key stakeholders (n=5) to ensure that evaluators understood the aims of the GRCF and its strategic fit within governmental policy.
- In-depth case studies with 24 projects funded through GRCF Round 2. Case study interviews were undertaken with project staff, volunteers and participants. Where possible, evaluation staff also visited project sites to better understand projects and the types of activities that they are delivering. For case studies, a total of 42 staff interviews, 16 participant interviews, 14 volunteer interviews, and eight site visits were undertaken.
- Fifteen thematic workshops with 72 project leads (nine workshops at the interim stage and six workshops at the final stage of the evaluation). Each workshop focused on an environmental theme against which projects were required to deliver in their GRCF Round 2 delivery (nature conservation and restoration: habitats, nature-based solutions, or connecting people with nature), and explored the delivery of activities, the progress towards these aims, challenges, the impact of project activity, and the legacy and sustainability of projects post-GRCF.
- The Wave 1 survey was distributed to all projects in May 2022 to provide eNGOs with an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences of GRCF Round 2. This explored project aims, experiences of the application process and of staff and volunteer recruitment, and progress in project delivery. Across the 90 projects, 75 completed the survey, providing a healthy response rate of 83 per cent.
- The Wave 2 survey was distributed to all projects in July 2023 to provide eNGOs with an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences of GRCF Round 2. This survey explored experiences of project delivery, reflections on staff and volunteer recruitment and retainment, the impact of project delivery, and considerations of its longer-term sustainability. Across the 90 projects, similarly, 75 completed the survey, providing a response rate of 83 per cent.
- An in-depth review of all GRCF Round 2 monitoring information recorded across all project delivery.
- A value for money (VfM) analysis which includes a cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) calculating the cost per unit of output/outcome that is comparable across GRCF R1 and R2.

Where ‘monitoring information’ is referenced in this report, these data have been obtained from several sources. These include data collected from projects through the GRCF monitoring app. Projects are required to upload the following information to the app:

- **Site data** – these include all project sites and their location.
- **Job data** – these include all roles supported through GRCF Round 2, the roles’ FTE, whether the role is an apprenticeship, their employer, the support offered, equalities data, the level of qualification provided (if relevant), the site on which the role is based, and its location.
- **Conservation data** – these data document the type of activity undertaken and whether any conservation activity includes the restoration or creation of habitats, the habitat type, tree-planting activity, the species of trees planted, the condition of habitats, whether the area includes any designated or protected sites, species being targeted, the direct and indirect amount of land (in kilometres, hectares or acres) benefitting from this activity, and the location of this conservation activity.
- **Engagement data** – these include the type of engagement activity delivered, the number of events held within this, the total number of people engaged in said events, whether or not this involves any social-prescribing activity, whether this engagement targets a specific target audience, the project sites on which events have been held, and the location of the sites.
- **Infrastructure data** – these document the type of infrastructure activity that has taken place, the length of works if linear (in kilometres), the project sites on which these works have taken place, and the location of the sites.

This provides ‘levels’ of data against which it is useful to report, where data cover individual actions such as conservation activities or engagement events, on a range of sites, led by each project. The table below sets out these totals as provided by projects, after data cleaning and analysis.

Table 2.1: Number of projects, sites and actions for Round 2, by programme theme

Type of activity	Projects	Sites	Actions
Nature conservation and restoration	85	965	2,205
Connecting people with nature	87	1,173	3,622
Infrastructure	50	190	376
Jobs	89	158	876
Total	90	1,839	N/A

Base: GRCF monitoring information.

6. Process Evaluation

6.1. Section Summary

- In final workshops, projects reported that the GRCF Round 2 funding came at the 'right' time, and the majority of surveyed GRCF Round 2 projects found the GRCF application process to be clear and straightforward and the bid-awarding process to be transparent.
- Projects reflected that GRCF Round 2 funding has allowed them to support staff to retain their roles in the longer term and/or secure longer-term roles post-GRCF. This suggests that GRCF investment is being retained within the sector.
- GRCF project delivery provided projects with the opportunity to 'test or pilot' working with new partners or organisations with which they had engaged but had never directly worked. This helped eNGOs to solidify ways of working, as well as increasing confidence that they would be able to work with GRCF partners again.
- Partnerships supported lead eNGOs' reach into specific communities with which they had not previously engaged or had struggled to engage. Working with smaller local community groups or organisations, in particular, meant that they were able to learn more about how to engage with specific groups as well as the trusted pathways through which to engage them.
- Where projects faced challenges in project delivery, it was believed that said challenges were unavoidable but resolved over time (e.g. delays to activity due to delays in securing statutory consents for land use).

This section explores stakeholder and project views on the GRCF rationale, delivery model, and project progress. It draws on interim and final project workshops, the Wave 1 and Wave 2 project surveys, project-level reports, and evaluation report findings submitted to the Heritage Fund for GRCF Round 1 and Round 2.

6.2. Rationale

The rationale behind the GRCF has remained consistent across Round 1 and Round 2. For stakeholders, the GRCF was perceived to be a COVID-19 emergency response to ensure economic recovery of organisations and projects within the environmental sector. Additionally, it was believed that the GRCF would support projects to create long-term and sustainable changes to protect species and the natural world.

As highlighted in the [First Interim GRCF Round 2 Report](#), for almost half of surveyed projects (46 per cent; 32/70), the main driver behind applying to the GRCF was to address environmental concerns in their local areas. Around one third of projects reported that their application to the GRCF was an opportunity to reach new audiences, fill employment vacancies and/or train existing staff (34 per cent; 24/70).

Projects described GRCF Round 2 as directly responding to an existing need and, in 20 per cent of cases (14/70), also suggested that their project was ready to implement but required capital investment. This aligns with [GRCF Round 1 evaluation](#) findings, where projects suggested that the GRCF was the only immediate source of funding available to eNGOs in response to the pandemic in 2020.

Considering the [Wildlife and Countryside Link's May 2020 research](#), which found that 330 projects across England were 'shovel-ready', fewer GRCF Round 2 projects than anticipated (14) described themselves as 'ready to deliver but requiring capital investment'. Although an initial 69 projects were funded in Round 1 and others may have been funded through other means, this may suggest that projects were not as prepared to launch into delivery as initially thought in May 2020. Overall, many GRCF Round 2 projects were not 'shovel-ready'; rather, they required investment to implement and kickstart clear aims and ambitions to support local nature, as well as their own organisational resilience, and support new and diverse ways of working. Whilst it was anticipated that a greater number of projects would be able to get off the ground quickly, the rationale and purpose of the programme have remained consistent and needed, supporting eNGOs to adapt and deliver despite COVID-19 and external market pressures.

6.3. Application Process

Table 3.1 below illustrates that the majority of surveyed GRCF Round 2 projects found the GRCF application process to be clear and straightforward and the bid-awarding process to be transparent. Where projects provided additional feedback, they commonly praised the level of guidance and information that the Heritage Fund offered to applicants, particularly the guidance documentation and webinars. Considering feedback from GRCF Round 1 projects, additional information was provided to prospective GRCF Round 2 applicants to ensure that they felt informed and aware of project requirements. GRCF Round 2 project feedback suggests that the additional detail provided to applicants for GRCF Round 2 was positively received.

Table 3.1: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Agreement with statement	The application process was clear and straightforward	The process by which project bids were awarded was transparent
Completely agree	36%	41%
Somewhat agree	49%	35%
Neither agree nor disagree	7%	16%
Somewhat disagree	6%	9%
Completely disagree	3%	0%

Base: Wave 1 survey interviewees (n=70).

As outlined in the [First Interim GRCF Round 2 Report](#), a minority of projects suggested that the application form itself was long, placing an additional burden on bidding eNGOs, particularly smaller eNGOs with limited resources. For many eNGOs, however, it was the first time that they had submitted a bid to the Heritage Fund. Where eNGOs had previously submitted a bid to the Heritage Fund, they acknowledged that the application could be difficult but that they were confident that they knew how to approach it.

Timescales were also identified by a minority of projects as challenging when applying for the GRCF in Round 1 and Round 2. Short timescales were perceived to be exacerbating pressures felt by eNGOs who found the application process to be long and challenging. To ensure that the application process is accessible for all eNGOs, not merely eNGOs that have previously applied to the Heritage Fund, it is recommended that future provision should offer greater lead-in time for applications to reduce the resource burden on eNGOs with limited or strained funds.

6.4. Recruitment

This subsection draws on findings outlined in the Second Interim Report with regard to projects' perceptions of recruiting staff or volunteers to support their delivery, as well as findings from the final round of thematic workshops, the Wave 2 survey, and project-level evaluation reports.

3.3.1. Staff Recruitment

As identified in the [Second Interim GRCF Round 2 Report](#), within workshop sessions, projects provided mixed feedback on their recruitment experience. Where projects were positive, they successfully recruited for their GRCF Round 2 roles or found alternative solutions where roles were unfilled. In final project workshops, staff reflected that GRCF Round 2 funding came at the 'right' time, saving eNGOs from

making some of their roles redundant and helping others who had made staff redundant over the course of the pandemic:

‘For us, it was incredibly important funding. After COVID-19 our staff numbers went from nine to three. Since the funding we’ve gone back up to nine staff members again.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

This suggests that GRCF Round 2 successfully supported economic recovery of organisations post-COVID-19, in line with its key aims.

Additionally, in final workshops, projects reflected that GRCF Round 2 funding allowed them to support staff to retain their roles in the longer term and/or secure longer-term roles post-GRCF. This also provided eNGOs with more time to seek out longer-term funding to secure roles beyond their GRCF project. In other cases, projects reported that their staff have since moved on to other roles within the environmental sector. This was still perceived by projects to be a positive impact, as GRCF project delivery has allowed staff to gain experience, helping them to secure other permanent roles within the sector. Overall, this is a positive finding because it suggests that GRCF investment is being retained within the sector.

The key challenge associated with recruitment to GRCF roles was that of the timescales of project delivery. As delivery was anticipated to occur over an 18-month delivery period, projects reported that the temporary nature of the job roles offered acted as a disincentive for prospective applicants. Additionally, projects reported that the set timescales for all GRCF Round 2 projects led to many projects seeking to recruit for similar roles at the same time, which served to increase the competition in securing applicants. This resulted in some projects being left with few or no applications for their GRCF roles.

Within the final project workshops and project-level reports, the relatively short timescale of project delivery was also perceived to be a challenge because it left newly recruited staff with little time to embed themselves within their respective organisation and learn how to perform their role before commencing with intensive project delivery. Projects suggested that whilst many new recruits required training, supporting individuals who were new to the sector felt like an additional responsibility for managers who were conscious of the need to begin delivering their respective projects.

Whilst eNGOs likely knew that hiring apprentices who were new to the sector would incur training costs, projects reported in a minority of cases that the resource requirements and support needs were greater than they had anticipated. This suggests that some projects underestimated the amount of time required to manage and support individuals who were new to their role. Overall, however, the length of apprenticeship posts in GRCF Round 2 appeared to be reasonable, with posts typically lasting between 12 and 18 months. This is longer than a standard apprenticeship post (which is set over a 6–12-month period).

As previously reported, the competitiveness of salaries that organisations were able to offer was identified as an additional barrier when looking to recruit staff. Projects noted that eNGO roles are typically lower-paid than roles in the private sector and that they were unable to offer higher salaries for their GRCF Round 2 roles. Projects reported that this issue was exacerbated by increasingly competitive job markets during the pandemic recovery as well as increasingly higher wage trends across the UK. This made it more difficult for projects to compete for appropriate candidates with desirable qualifications, skills and experience.

As part of the GRCF Round 2 application, the Heritage Fund did not set a maximum amount of project spend for role costs, and projects were able to set their own wage requirements within project bids. Whilst projects may have requested particular staff costs in alignment with their organisational salary bandings, the eNGO salary offer is widely perceived to be unattractive to prospective applicants. To ensure that funders are supporting longer-term sustainability of the sector, future funding programmes should consider outlining an expectation of role wage packages within guidance to applicants. It is anticipated that wage expectations would be informed by labour market insight and best-practice standards. This will ensure that funders are aligning with wider efforts to make environmental sector careers appear more attractive and that skilled and experienced staff are retained within the sector.

Challenges associated with time pressures are, to a certain extent, inevitable with relatively short-term funding. Time pressure challenges for the GRCF were particularly unavoidable, considering that the fund was designed in response to COVID-19. Where possible, future funding programmes should consider if and how recruitment strategies could better account for this increased competition. This could include support in increasing the profile of opportunities, further consideration of the geographical balance of awards to ensure an even spread of opportunities, and/or partnerships with other organisations with experience that are engaging with more diverse applicants. Moreover, a revised recruitment strategy should consider the pressured timeline for the delivery of nature-based projects, particularly where there is delivery based on outdoor conservation, restoration, and nature-based solutions work, which needs to occur in a particular season. Where possible, application award deadlines should be set to give projects considerable time to implement project delivery and recruit before seasonal work needs to start to ensure that providers have sufficient time to deliver on environment-based activity within short-term funding programmes.

Throughout the GRCF Round 2 evaluation, projects praised the flexibility afforded to them by the Heritage Fund, particularly where they faced challenges regarding recruitment and staffing. Where roles could not be filled, GRCF grants allowed projects to employ contractors to ensure that delivery remained on track. In addition, projects were able to make changes to their GRCF staff roles and/or the timescale of their recruitment where required. This flexibility throughout project delivery has allowed projects to respond accordingly to their own organisational and delivery needs.

3.3.2. Kickstart Trainee Recruitment

Across GRCF Round 2, one third of all roles created were apprenticeships (33 per cent; 183/550). Whilst monitoring information only highlights 21 apprentices or trainees who were recruited through the Kickstart Scheme, it is assumed from project and stakeholder feedback that many more roles were recruited through the Kickstart Scheme but that this has been underreported in the monitoring data. It is important to note that the Kickstart Scheme provides trainees with a minimum wage salary (and living wage salary if aged 25 or above). GRCF Round 2 projects were able to supplement the wages of Kickstart trainees; however, these could not be covered through GRCF monies.

[The Second Interim GRCF Round 2 Report](#) details projects' praise for the use of Kickstart within GRCF Round 2, as it enabled them to fill entry-level roles with more diverse candidates. Through Kickstart, many projects recruited individuals who had just left school with no work experience nor sector-specific qualifications. Projects saw value in recruiting applicants who were different from those that they would typically hire and in seeing the individuals grow. This aligns with wider efforts across the sector to support a diverse workforce (as highlighted in the 2021 [Green Jobs Taskforce Report](#)), and had a positive impact on both the trainee and the organisation. Similar feedback was provided in final workshops in which projects reported that utilising Kickstart helped to diversify their organisation's workforce:

'There's been a shift in the dynamics of the workforce, as we have some additional skillsets in the organisation that we didn't have before.' (Final Workshop Project Response)

Across the GRCF Round 2 evaluation, projects have fed back that the recruitment processes associated with Kickstart could be challenging. Whilst recruiting through Jobcentre Plus (as is required for Kickstart placements) could be perceived as reducing pressures on organisations, projects commonly perceived the process to be 'slowing down' recruitment. Projects suggested that some Jobcentre Plus work coaches encouraged young people who did not have an interest in working in the environmental sector to apply for the available GRCF roles. This resulted in some unsuitable applicants being interviewed and a minority of hired trainees showing a lack of interest in or commitment to their GRCF role. In final workshops, projects reported that difficulties surrounding the Kickstart recruitment process resulted in their using other schemes to recruit for roles, as they had greater autonomy over how they recruited applicants.

3.3.3. Volunteer Recruitment

In final workshops, projects reported that they were able to capitalise on increased public interest in volunteering after the pandemic through their GRCF Round 2 project:

'We saw a big surge in volunteering opportunities coming off COVID-19. There was massive demand in our area and it was really good to be able to get those opportunities out there [with

our project] and that has continued, I think.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

A minority of projects used the increase in engagement and project funds to develop new forms of volunteering opportunities such as micro-volunteering placements, where limited time commitment is required, and volunteers can take part in short one-off tasks. In some cases, projects reported that GRCF funding allowed them to expand their typical volunteering offer to focus on new areas of interest. For example, one project developed a community outreach volunteer role to diversify engagement with local people.

As a result of partnerships with other organisations, particularly local ‘Friends of’ groups and other local organisations, projects commonly felt that their engagement with volunteers improved throughout GRCF Round 2. Projects were able to utilise existing volunteer groups associated with partners, and in many cases it was hoped that engagement with said groups would continue post-GRCF project delivery. Additional details on the strengths and challenges associated with partnership working can be found in [Section 3.4](#).

In final workshops, case study interviews, and project-level reports, projects frequently reported that GRCF resource provided them with more time than they would normally have to explore new and existing volunteer role needs and the types of skills that volunteers possess and/or would like to develop. This allowed projects to reflect on their existing processes and identify where changes could be made to their approach to recruiting, supporting and retaining volunteers. This is a key strength of project approaches adopted in GRCF Round 2, as it has provided learning which will benefit eNGOs in the future. As demonstrated in the quote below, learning about volunteer needs through the GRCF has ensured that some projects are better aware of what they need to do to engage with a more diverse range of volunteers inclusively:

‘[We found that] volunteers wanted to learn and use their skills, as well as feel as though they’re making a difference and contributing to a cause. This [process] also highlighted that we’re not doing enough at the weekend and need to make more of an effort to meet the needs of other demographics.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

A minority of projects reported that whilst their project resulted in greater levels of engagement with a wider range of groups and communities, this was also a learning curve for their staff because some previously underrepresented groups (e.g. young people) needed additional or different support in comparison to the typical volunteer support that eNGOs had previously offered. Whilst projects were positive about their experience, they acknowledged that engaging a wider audience inclusively within their delivery required a more considered approach than they had initially anticipated.

6.5. Project Implementation and Delivery

This subsection draws on findings from the final round of thematic workshops, case studies, the Wave 2 survey, and project-level evaluation reports. Where applicable and relevant, Wave 2 survey findings will be cross-referenced with Wave 1 survey findings to detail project progress.

At the end of project delivery, the majority of projects reported that they had largely delivered activity against GRCF themes as anticipated. Across the surveyed projects, 49 reported that, to a large extent, they delivered all GRCF-themed activities as expected (65 per cent; 49/75), and only one project stated that they had not delivered their anticipated activity (against the theme of nature-based solutions) at all. This is a positive finding because it suggests that the proposed activity outlined in project bids was realistic and achievable and that where challenges were faced, they were overcome. Key strengths of project delivery, as well as challenges faced by projects, are detailed below.

Whilst all projects varied in scope, size and nature, across final workshops and project-level evaluations similar factors which led to successful activity were identified. These included:

- **Good partnership working practices**, including good communication across partners, an understanding of each partner's remit and expertise to utilise, and a clear and shared understanding of the required delivery approach. Partnership working is explored in greater detail in [Section 3.5](#) below.
- **Adequate staff capacity to effectively deliver**. In many cases in which projects identified successful project activity, sufficient staff capacity to take on the additional work was a key enabling factor. Where staff left their roles before the end of delivery, many projects reported that they had only been able to successfully continue because they could utilise other staff resources to backfill this post.
- **Availability of specific or bespoke training for staff, apprentices and volunteers**. As will be explored further in [Section 4.1](#), within many projects, staff, apprentices and volunteers had opportunities to become involved in new areas of work in which specialist knowledge or training was required (e.g. maintaining and restoring particular habitats or undertaking ecological surveys). Being able to offer bespoke training due to GRCF Round 2 funding helped to improve individuals' confidence in undertaking a range of tasks, and ensured that sustainable activity was possible.
- **Systematic and targeted approaches**. Projects frequently worked on areas that had complex ecosystems with multiple stakeholders (including landowners, local authorities, and local interest groups). Many projects suggested that to ensure that they were able to effectively deliver over the required delivery period, they had to be clear, transparent and strategic about what they were doing whilst also ensuring that activity remained in scope (as

per the original project bid). This ensured that they kept key stakeholders onside and developed infrastructure for activity that could be built upon post-GRCF.

Key challenges for project delivery were frequently associated with timelines across both rounds of the GRCF. Wave 2 survey findings (see Figure 3.1 below) illustrate that three fifths of all surveyed Round 2 projects were faced with challenges surrounding the project timeline. In over one third of cases, projects identified the limited timeline and seasons as creating barriers to their project delivery (38 per cent; 27/72). As previously reported, whilst the GRCF is a short-term and competitive fund, projects reported that once they were set up, this typically left them with less than one year to deliver.

Many projects faced difficulties in delivery due to unfavourable weather conditions and suggested that the pressure to deliver was exacerbated by delivering over one cycle of seasons. Considering the outdoor setting of most projects, some activities, e.g. planting and flood management, were not possible during certain seasons and/or in poor weather conditions, e.g. heavy rain and snow.

Figure 3.1: Has your project experienced any of the following challenges?



Base: Wave 2 survey (n=72). Please note that this question was multiple-choice, meaning that it sums over 100 per cent.

In many cases, other challenges detailed in Figure 3.1 resulted in timeline pressures. For example, projects reported that increases in material costs as well as delays to capital works due to external market pressures had an impact on what they were able to deliver within project timescales:

‘Some of the biggest challenges we’ve faced relate to the increase in costs of materials and also finding contractors with the appropriate skills to complete the work that are available. This has had a knock-on effect on project timelines.’ (Project Response, Wave 2 Survey)

Losing key staff at key points of delivery was also commonly identified in final workshops as having a considerable impact on project delivery. This challenge appeared to grow as time passed, with staff more commonly leaving their roles in the latter stages of delivery when future funding and the continuation of GRCF roles were less certain.

In these cases, projects reported having to make difficult decisions regarding whether to try to absorb the roles within their existing workforce or to try to recruit to refill the roles. New rounds of recruitment after staff left their GRCF roles were perceived to be particularly difficult due to continuing wage uplifts across the UK and, in some cases, short-term contracts, meaning that said roles were less desirable than they were at the inception of GRCF Round 2.

Challenges also included delays associated with landowners changing their minds due to administration requirements, the 10-year term of the GRCF grant, other external opportunities (e.g. the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain and Environmental Land Management schemes), and delays to statutory consents being approved. This meant that the process took longer than anticipated and required additional time and resources to manage negotiations with landowners. Where the process was delayed, this exacerbated pressures on delivery, which projects frequently described as already being limited and pressured. Communication challenges with landowners are explored in more detail in [Section 3.5](#).

In most cases, challenges were overcome by projects revising their delivery plans and milestones (40 per cent; 29/72) or deploying more internal staff resource to deliver project activity (25 per cent; 18/72). It is important to highlight that whilst most projects have delivered their projects and believed that they have done so successfully, a minority of projects also acknowledged that high workloads due to GRCF Round 2 delivery were necessary in order to work to project timescales, but they set an unrealistic expectation regarding what is normally achievable day to day.

It is important to also highlight that across final workshops, projects frequently praised the flexibility afforded to them by the Heritage Fund. For example, where projects could demonstrate the need for an extension, they were granted extensions of up to three months to ensure that all project activity could be delivered, despite unforeseen delays or constraints. However, projects across final workshops and in case study interviews also reflected that challenges associated with GRCF Round 2 delivery have taught them the need for greater contingency planning for future projects:

‘When you put a bid in, it might be six months until it gets approved. Then it takes a few more months to get up and running and then you have inflation increase in the way it has. You may be a year on by the time you have used some of the grant funds — you need to think about contingency at that application stage so that you don’t underestimate the cost of capital works. You need margin in project delivery.’ (Case Study In-Depth interview)

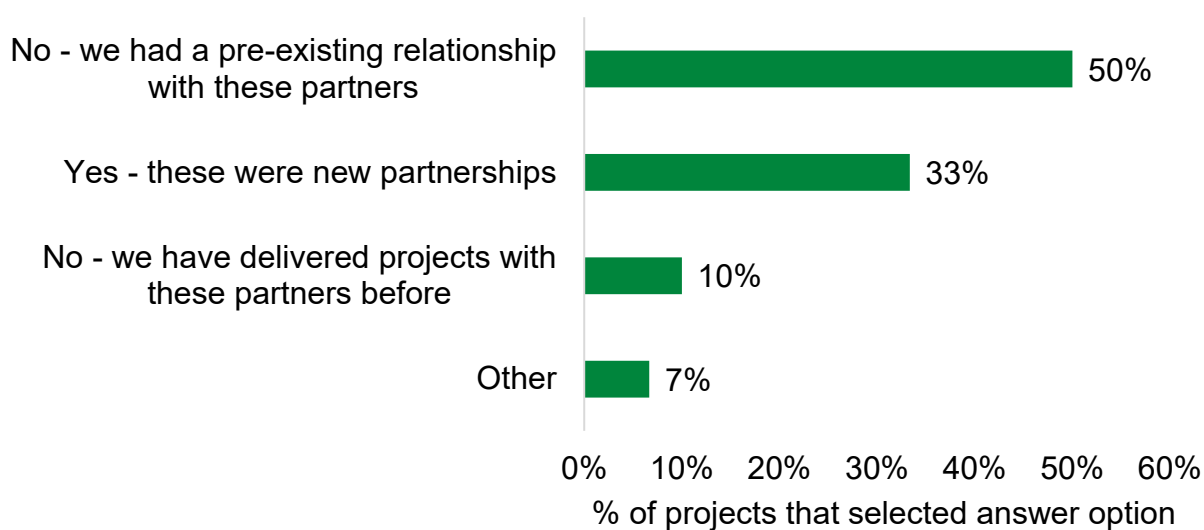
Whilst future funding programmes should look to retain the flexible approach utilised within GRCF Round 2, projects should also be reminded that their initial bids are expected to account for contingency risks (e.g. wage inflation and material cost increases).

6.6. Partnership Working

The majority of projects delivered their activity in partnership with at least one other organisation (80 per cent; 60/75). Across the GRCF, there have been a wide range of project partners, including local community groups, local authorities, local and national health charities, older-age care services, networks dedicated to individuals from a range of different ethnic backgrounds, youth groups, schools, other eNGOs, landowners, and specialist land management organisations.

As illustrated in Figure 3.2 below, half of all projects delivered in partnership had a pre-existing relationship with their partners, and one third of projects were delivered in conjunction with partners new to the lead eNGO. This suggests that GRCF Round 2 funding enabled eNGOs to work with new partners and with known organisations in new ways, whilst six projects (10 per cent, as shown in Figure 3.2) were delivered with other organisations with which they had delivered projects previously.

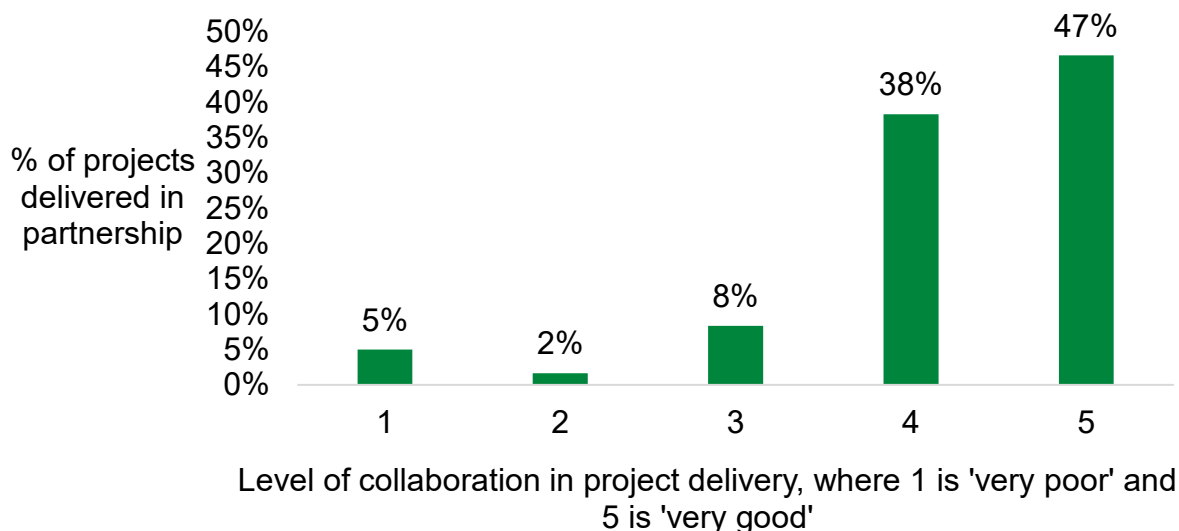
Figure 3.2: Were these partnerships formed to deliver the project?



Base: All surveyed projects that stated that they had delivered their project in partnership (n=60).

Across evaluation activities (for both GRCF Round 1 and GRCF Round 2), eNGOs were positive about their collaboration with partners. Figure 3.3 below demonstrates that at the end of project delivery, the majority of projects were still positive about how they had worked with their partners (85 per cent; 51/60).

Figure 3.3: On a scale of 1–5, where 5 is 'very good' and 1 is 'very poor', how would you describe the levels of partnership collaboration at the end of your project delivery?



Base: All surveyed projects that stated that they had delivered their project in partnership (n=60).

Across final workshops and case study interviews and within project-level evaluations, projects identified a range of key benefits from delivering their GRCF Round 2 project in partnership. These included strengthening existing working relationships with partner organisations, improving the knowledge that they had of a partner's systems, and enabling stronger outreach into local areas as a result of working with more local organisations and landowners.

Projects frequently reported that GRCF project delivery provided them with the opportunity to 'test or pilot' working with new partners or organisations with which they had engaged but had never directly worked. For many eNGOs, this solidified ways of working, as well as increasing confidence that they would be able to work with GRCF partners again in the future. This reinforces a similar finding from the GRCF Round 1 evaluation. In line with its aims, this demonstrates that the GRCF has successfully supported eNGOs in creating long-term and sustainable changes to their own organisations. The benefits of partnership working in terms of organisational resilience are explored further in [Section 6](#):

'We had known about the partner before, but this strengthened that relationship. By the end of it, there was mutual respect. We were able to share information across the board.' (Final Workshop Project Response)

Working with partners was perceived by project leads to be benefitting organisations' collective understanding of what each respective partner did and how they worked. This was perceived to be benefitting organisations in the longer term, as it ensured that respective organisations were aware of one another's remit, resource, and how they could effectively collaborate. Working in this way also benefitting new staff,

particularly trainees and apprentices. In some cases, trainees, interns and/or apprentices would work across a number of partners through project delivery. This allowed trainees and apprentices to gain a wider view of what it is like working in the environmental sector:

‘We will continue to work with all the partners, and this project has improved that working relationship. It has also improved cross-sector awareness and roles across different partners. One of the main aims of the internships is for interns to get a good flavour of how these organisations work in [the environmental sector], so this cross-collaboration has made that a lot easier. We had worked with all partners before, but this project solidified that working relationship.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

As highlighted in [Section 3.3](#), some eNGOs struggled to support new staff, apprentices and trainees due to their own resource pressures. Where this is a concern in future funding programmes, eNGOs should be advised to co-recruit staff, apprentices and/or trainees to ensure that the resource burden is shared and those in supported roles receive a wide range of support from across project partners. Co-recruiting may include various project partners supporting new recruits at different stages of the recruitment process, the induction phase and/or with in-work support.

Partnerships were also perceived to be an effective way of increasing lead eNGOs’ reach into specific communities with which they had not previously engaged or had struggled to engage. In these cases, projects stated that working with smaller local community groups or organisations meant that they were able to learn more about how to engage with specific groups as well as the trusted pathways through which to engage them. As previously reported, this sharing of knowledge and resources was praised. Projects found value in sharing learning and supporting community engagement collectively, as it better allowed all partners to meet the needs of local nature and people.

GRCF Round 2 project delivery also necessitated that eNGOs work with local landowners and formalise their relationships with them where appropriate. Whilst some projects had worked with landowners previously, many had not done so. Project benefits for habitats and landscapes were frequently identified and praised by landowners throughout GRCF Round 2 project delivery. In some cases, this resulted in landowners becoming more invested in project aims and increasing their support for wider conservation efforts in the area. Similarly, in other projects, landowners were happy to invest their resources in longer-term action, as the positive impacts of GRCF project delivery were visible and of benefit to them.

Where projects cited challenges in their project partnerships, these were generally resolvable, with only nine surveyed projects reporting that they had little or no collaboration with project partners over the course of delivery. Partnership challenges frequently centred on a lack of communication between organisations as

well as the limited resource of smaller organisations to effectively deliver the project as anticipated.

Projects commonly reported that communication issues were anticipated in the early stages of project delivery because time was needed to establish and build relationships between organisations as they got used to working with one another. These concerns typically eased over time as respective partners developed a better understanding of how one another worked. For some projects, particular types of partners proved to be more challenging to communicate with than others, particularly schools and landowners. A minority of projects reported that engaging with schools new to their eNGO was time-consuming and, in some cases, less effective than they had anticipated. Whilst this resulted in project staff having to spend more time and resource on engaging prospective partner schools, it is also unsurprising when considering schools' limited capacity due to increased pressures post-pandemic (such as high staff and student sickness absence).

The complexity of landowner arrangements was also perceived to be delaying communication with project partners, and in some cases in which there were multiple landowners, it also made it difficult to agree on how to proceed with project delivery. One project said:

'There's a lot of complicated land ownership. In some parts, it's owned by one council, but the planning permissions for that same bit of land are actually with a different council. The challenge is just trying to engage all these different landowners. [...] The local community interest company is just forever trying to understand who all those landowners are, because it's still a little-bit vague. Some parts of the park, no one ever really seems to know [who owns them].' (Final Workshop Project Response)

In most cases, projects felt that these challenges were unavoidable but resolved over time. Future funding programmes which offer advice to applicants at the bidding stage, as GRCF Round 2 did, should ensure that prospective projects are sufficiently warned about the considerations and capacity implications of engaging with schools and landowners that are new to them, particularly where funding is time-sensitive and the duration of project delivery is finite.

6.7. Management and Governance

Table 3.2 below illustrates that the majority of projects felt supported throughout their project delivery to provide the required funding monitoring requirements and that these requirements were adequate and proportionate.

Table 3.2: Reflecting on your experience of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, please select the option below which best reflects your answer to each statement

Answer option	Project monitoring requirements throughout delivery felt adequate and proportionate	My organisation was effectively supported to complete progress reports	My organisation was effectively supported to complete the end-of-grant report
Strongly agree	34%	53%	49%
Somewhat agree	48%	33%	38%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%	7%	7%
Somewhat disagree	7%	4%	3%
Strongly disagree	1%	3%	3%

Base: Wave 2 survey (n=73).

Across the final project workshops and survey, projects commonly praised the role of the Heritage Fund within the GRCF, particularly highlighting the design of the GRCF, the proportionate evidence required to access grant funds, and the support from their respective dedicated Investment Manager.

Most frequently, projects praised the supportive management that they received through GRCF Round 2. The allocated Heritage Fund Investment Manager was described by staff as key, not only responding quickly and helpfully to queries, but also holding projects to account where needed. The speed of management and governance decisions made by the Heritage Fund was markedly commended by projects, as they highlighted that their eNGOs were facing pressures (particularly in relation to staffing after COVID-19):

Project responses, Wave 2 survey:

‘The [Heritage Fund] project officers working on the scheme seemed genuinely interested in the project, delighted with successes, and wanted to celebrate results with us.’

‘The support from [the Heritage Fund] throughout the funding period was always excellent with fast and positive responses to questions.’

‘Good project management from GRCF was [...] key. The staff involved fulfilled the role of critical friends, being supportive while challenging when required.’

Having a supportive Investment Manager was also perceived by projects to be beneficial, as it ensured that where projects faced challenges, they felt comfortable about talking these through and felt as though they were then offered effective and constructive advice.

Projects commonly reported that as the GRCF was designed to focus on outcomes and limit the administrative burden, they felt that this informed how they were managed by the Heritage Fund. GRCF areas of priority (such as nature conservation and restoration as well as jobs and resilience) were described as aligning well with eNGOs' own priorities. As a result, projects said that it felt like they were 'working with' the Heritage Fund to deliver outcomes. Projects felt that this way of working was effective, particularly praising the flexibility afforded to them by the Heritage Fund. As previously reported, this flexibility throughout project delivery allowed projects to respond accordingly to their own organisational and delivery needs. An example of this flexibility is provided below:

'We were under budget, so with the money left behind we were able to reinvest and surpass most of our targets by a third. I would like to give the Heritage Fund credit for this because the money reinvested needs to fulfil certain compliances. We were able to use the money well because they kept in close communication with us. They were really cooperative, where funders sometimes aren't; the person we were in contact with made sure it ran really smoothly.' (Final Workshop Project Response)

The GRCF's focus on delivery and outcomes, projects suggested, also translated to monitoring and reporting requirements. As illustrated by Table 3.2 above, most projects perceived the GRCF project monitoring and reporting requirements to be manageable and proportionate (82 per cent; 60/73 and 86 per cent; 63/73, respectively). Light-touch reporting requirements were felt by projects to be allowing them more time to focus their resource on delivery. It is important to highlight that whilst projects reported that the GRCF approach to reporting felt less time-consuming than they had experienced in other funding programmes, they still felt that the information provided sufficient evidence of project delivery and impact:

Project responses, Wave 2 survey:

'It is a very flexible funding mechanism that delivered large conservation benefits. Key strengths were flexibility and low administration, allowing staff to focus on delivering nature recovery and engagement. It would be great if there were additional rounds of this fund.'

'It was quite light-touch with less frequent reporting than other funders, which undeniably saved time, although overall provided the same amount of information.'

Reflecting on whether any improvements could be made to the GRCF management and governance approach, projects that participated in the final survey and/or final workshops most commonly stated that the approach could only be improved by having a longer timeline for project delivery and reporting (58 per cent; 38/66 of survey respondents). As highlighted in [Section 3.4](#), projects felt that the timescales for project delivery hindered their ability to effectively deliver their outcomes. This had a negative impact on what they were able to provide in terms of evidence for final project-level reporting:

‘Conservation work is necessarily seasonal, with most management work and tree planting happening in the autumn and winter to avoid disturbance to breeding wildlife and to plant or cut trees when they are dormant. This also means that work can be delayed by the weather — flooding preventing site access, for example. The scheme’s strict cut-off date of March 2023 meant that it clashed with the second season of work, making reporting and project closedown unnecessarily difficult. Considering the scheme timetable in the context of the work it is targeting would be very helpful, e.g. allowing for two full seasons of work and then a period for closedown and reporting.’ (Project Response, Wave 2 Survey)

Whilst the Heritage Fund’s flexible approach was praised by projects, fixed and limited timescales that only covered one growing season were perceived to be making the project delivery and reporting challenging. In these cases, projects suggested that additional time should be allocated at the end of project delivery to allow time to feed back and submit project closure reports.

Wave 2 survey responses indicate that almost a quarter of surveyed projects also believe that a more joined-up approach to monitoring information would benefit the GRCF and reduce the burden on projects (24 per cent; 16/66). Where projects referenced a need for joined-up systems, they commonly referenced having to submit evidence through the Heritage Fund grant management portal as well as the separate monitoring information app. In these cases, projects suggested that the data required should be streamlined so that they are only inputted once. Additionally, projects reported that it would have been useful to know what information they would be required to submit to portals prior to project delivery. This would have allowed them to appropriately design data capture systems to align with the information required.

As will be explored further in [Section 4](#), due to the wide range of project activity and eNGOs involved, projects adopted a range of approaches when submitting monitoring information. Considering projects’ own concerns surrounding monitoring information submission, future funding programmes should look to be more prescriptive in the data being asked for by projects at an earlier stage of project delivery. If projects were offered additional guidance and clarity as to the information required of them at the project implementation stage, this would allow them to develop their own evidence-gathering mechanisms more effectively.

Whilst monitoring information systems have been in place through the GRCF, with guidance given as to how projects can approach this, options have been typically broad and open-ended. Additional support for eNGOs to effectively gather information linked to the 2019 [Environmental Plan Outcome Indicator Framework](#) would allow greater and more rigorous evidence gathering to identify contributions towards 25YEP goals.

7. Impact Evaluation

7.1. Section Summary

Monitoring data findings (to project closure)

GRCF programme monitoring data findings

- Across both rounds, GRCF conservation activities have directly benefitted 448,318ha and 1,159km of land across England.
- As a direct result of GRCF funding, 1,708,520 trees were planted in England across 693 sites.
- Overall, 402,740 people have engaged with 25,036 events across the lifetime of the GRCF both in person and online.
- Projects across both rounds of the GRCF have installed 609 elements of infrastructure across 230 sites.
- GRCF-funded projects have directly supported 1,529 jobs, equivalent to 1,053 FTE (Table 4.17).
- Through the project costs spent on goods and services, it is estimated that the GRCF programme has supported an additional 1,101 full-time indirect jobs.

Round 2 monitoring data findings

- In GRCF Round 2, conservation activity has directly benefitted 122,318ha and 587km of land across 965 sites across England.
- In GRCF Round 2, 54 projects have planted 616,811 trees.
- In total, 244,340 people have engaged with 16,779 events held throughout GRCF Round 2 to date both in person and online.
- In Round 2, 50 projects detailed works improving or installing infrastructure, which were carried out over 190 sites, totalling 416 elements of infrastructure.
- In total, 876 jobs have been directly supported across GRCF Round 2 projects. These are equivalent to 580 FTE jobs.
- Through the project costs spent on goods and services, it is estimated that Round 2 has supported an additional 553 full-time indirect jobs.

GRCF Round 2 workshops, Wave 2 survey findings, and project-level evaluation synthesis

- GRCF activity has resulted in longer-term multi-stakeholder engagement in local nature activities, including partners such as landowners, local authorities, schools, and other local eNGOs.
- Whilst many projects are unable to measure and identify the longer-term positive impact of their projects within the timeframe of GRCF project delivery, the funding has enabled and encouraged projects to put in place data collection systems to ensure that longer-term impacts on nature can be evidenced.
- The use of GRCF monies to recruit for new outreach or volunteer coordinator roles was a key enabler of effective engagement-based activity. New outreach

and coordinator roles enabled projects to better reach new community groups and audiences and better target volunteer efforts towards project delivery.

- In the final workshops, projects were overtly positive about the impact that GRCF Round 2 has had on their own organisational capacity and resilience. Projects reported being able to diversify their service offer, secure funding via other funding streams, access new markets due to working on new sites, and approach project delivery in new ways due to the GRCF.

This section of the report summarises the impact of project delivery across the GRCF. It draws on the GRCF Round 1 evaluation, the GRCF Round 2 Wave 2 survey, final thematic workshops, case studies, and monitoring data which evidence projects' delivery progress.

This section consists of three overarching subsections based on the key GRCF themes: nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions; connecting people with nature; and resilience and employment.

7.2. Nature Conservation and Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

This first subsection explores key outcomes and impacts regarding nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions within GRCF Round 2. This includes an exploration of project data reported through the monitoring app, demonstrating project progress and project reflections on delivering against this theme. Reflections include an exploration of the opportunities and challenges faced by projects in measuring nature-based outcomes, tangible impacts achieved and sought, and the development of knowledge and skills as a result of project delivery.

4.1.1. Reported Outcomes

An overview of the GRCF's impact based on an assessment of monitoring data submitted to the Heritage Fund is presented below. This includes the land and area benefitting from GRCF Round 2 activity, the type of habitat targeted, and tree planting.

Land Benefitting from GRCF Activity

Overall, 1,895 sites have benefitted from GRCF environmental actions across the programme. In total, 965 sites have benefitted environmentally from GRCF Round 2 activity.

In Round 2, 530 sites (55 per cent) have included a habitat listed as a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan ([UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Priority Habitat Descriptions](#), 2009) (UK BAP). Table 4.1 below sets out the number of priority habitats (where provided by projects), showing those habitats which can be found on 10 or more sites. In total, positive environmental actions were undertaken on 44 different UK BAP priority habitat types.

For the remaining 45 per cent of sites that do not have a priority habitat listed, this may indicate either an absence of data on the habitat type or that they are working on other types of habitat which are not priority habitats in the UK BAP. As highlighted in Section 3.6, future funding programmes should ensure that where projects are asked to provide data, systems ensure that definitive answers are required and provided. This will ensure greater rigour when assessing the impact of project delivery.

Table 4.2: Number and percentage of GRCF sites containing ‘priority habitats’ (over 10 sites)

BAP habitat	Total sites Round 2	% of sites Round 2	Programme total	Programme %
Rivers	136	14%	231	12%
Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	131	14%	270	14%
Hedgerows	115	12%	171	9%
Lowland Meadows	101	10%	150	8%
Ponds	69	7%	131	7%
Wet Woodland	36	4%	67	4%
Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh	32	3%	39	2%
Wood Pasture & Parkland	24	2%	65	3%
Traditional Orchards	22	2%	31	2%
Lowland Heathland	20	2%	43	2%
Lowland Fens	15	2%	27	1%
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	15	2%	36	2%
Reedbeds	14	1%	34	2%
Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pastures	13	1%	20	1%
Aquifer Fed Naturally Fluctuating Water Bodies	13	1%	26	1%
Estuarine Rocky Habitats	11	1%	11	1%

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (Round 1 n=965 sites and GRCF total=1,895 sites). These data relate to Table 3.11 in Round 1. Please note that there were no data available for Round 1 in relation to the number of Estuarine Rocky

Habitats sites which have benefitted from activity, so the total number of sites for Round 2 has been reported as the programme-level total.

A number of sites on which GRCF-funded environmental action has taken place are within areas protected by a conservation designation. **On a programme level, Round 1 and Round 2 had 585 sites with a conservation designation (31 per cent or 585/1,895 sites).** One third of all sites supported by Round 2 of the GRCF had some designation or protection in place (33 per cent; 319/965 sites benefitting from conservation activity).

Across Round 2 sites, 15 per cent (147/965 sites) undertook conservation action on areas classed as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and eight per cent classed as local wildlife sites. As demonstrated in Table 4.2 below, GRCF projects worked on a diverse range of designated or protected sites. This suggests that GRCF activity has supported the 2023 [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) target of bringing protected sites into a favourable condition by 2042 in line with 25YEP goals.

It should be noted that sites may contain multiple types of protection or designation, and the percentage totals for those with protection or designation in the table will total greater than 100 per cent. Some 61 per cent (590/965) of sites have provided data on areas which are protected or designated, and 271 sites (28 per cent) stated that there were no designations on the site. Again, this suggests that efforts across the GRCF have been made to contribute to 25YEP targets of improving the quality of protected sites.

Table 4.3: Sites which have a protection or designation

Type of protection or designation	Total sites Round 2	% of sites Round 2	Programme total	Programme %
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	147	15%	294	16%
Local Wildlife Sites	79	8%	136	7%
Protected by an Act of Parliament	63	7%	119	6%
Local Nature Reserves (LNR)	47	5%	92	5%
Special Protection Areas (SPA)	44	5%	58	3%
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	36	4%	81	4%
Ramsar	34	4%	43	2%
National Nature Reserves (NNR)	13	1%	33	2%
Marine Conservation Zones	3	<1%	7	<1%
No Designation	271	28%	604	32%
Total sites with protection or designation	319	33%	585	31%
Total sites for which protection or designation is known	590	61%	1,189	63%
Total sites benefitting from conservation activity	965	N/A	1,895	N/A

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (Round 2 n=965 sites, GRCF programme n=1,895 sites). These data relate to Table 3.9 in Round 1.

Across all GRCF Round 2 projects which completed conservation activity, 80 per cent (68/85 projects) shared the condition of the sites on which they were working, representing 683/965 sites on which conservation activity has occurred (71 per cent). Natural England categorises the condition of SSSIs as one of the following ([Natural England](#), 2013):

- favourable – habitats and features are in a healthy state and are being conserved by appropriate management

- unfavourable (recovering condition) – if current management measures are sustained the site will recover over time
- unfavourable (no change) or unfavourable (declining condition) – special features are not being conserved or are being lost, so without appropriate management the site will never reach a favourable or recovering condition; and
- part-destroyed or destroyed – there has been fundamental damage, where special features have been permanently lost and a favourable condition cannot be achieved.

Amongst the sites which shared their condition, 15 per cent (101/683) were described as being in a favourable condition, whilst 46 per cent (316/683 sites) were unfavourable and 12 sites were destroyed or part-destroyed. Of those which were in an unfavourable condition, most were noted to be recovering (182/683 sites or 19 per cent), with 80/683 sites (eight per cent) being unfavourable and showing no change in condition, as well as 54/683 sites being unfavourable and declining (six per cent). As highlighted above, future funding programmes should ensure that where projects are asked to provide data, systems ensure that definitive answers are required and provided. This will ensure greater rigour when assessing the impact of project delivery.

Area Benefitting from GRCF Activity

On a programme level, GRCF conservation activities have directly benefitted 448,318ha and 1,159km of land across England. This demonstrates programme-wide efforts to undertake environmental action across England.

In GRCF Round 2, conservation activity has directly benefitted 122,318ha and 587km of land across 965 sites across England, including both habitat creation and restoration activity. These figures include the creation or restoration of habitats directly benefitting 104km of rivers and 57km of hedgerows.

Where conservation activity has directly benefitted areas of land, this covers the land on which activities were carried out. For example, this could be the area on which trees were planted, hedgerows were maintained or scrubland was cleared. Where projects have included indirect land benefitting as a result of project activities, this implies that there has been an additional positive impact outside of the area on which activities have been carried out. This may include where benefits occurred downstream of a river due to direct works carried out, or where tree planting has created wider benefits to a surrounding area of land.

Projects reported indirect benefits due to GRCF Round 2 activities, impacting 518,823ha and 317km of land. In total, the direct and indirect areas of land having benefitted comprise 641,141ha and 904km (Table 4.3 below). Again, this suggests that GRCF project efforts have directly and effectively contributed to 25YEP aims and targets.

It should be noted that the data provided for a number of conservation actions suggested that activities have taken place over significant areas of land and that the

original estimation of land having benefitted was considerably higher than the final figure reported here. To ensure that data were accurate, where projects reported a direct benefit of 10,000ha or greater, this was considered to be an outlier and investigated further. Some of these figures were reporting errors and subsequently amended.

Table 4.4: Area of land directly and indirectly benefitting from environmental actions of GRCF Round 2 projects (hectares and kilometres)

Type of area	Direct benefit Round 2	Indirect benefit Round 2	Total land benefitting Round 2	Programme direct	Programme indirect	Programme total
Total area (ha)	122,318	518,823	641,141	448,318	1,067,823	1,516,141
Total length (km)	587	317	904	1,159	420	1,579

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=965 sites). Please note that all figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. These data relate to Table 3.1 in Round 1.

Within the area of direct benefit for Round 2 activities:

- Ten per cent (12,517/122,318ha) was habitat creation activity
- Thirty-three per cent (40,303/122,318ha) was habitat restoration activity
- Nine per cent was both restoration and creation activity (11,230/122,318ha)
- Forty-six per cent (55,781/122,318ha) of activity was neither creation nor restoration activity
- Two per cent (2,486/122,318ha) did not specify whether the activity carried out was habitat creation, restoration or neither.

Further details on the area and distance of land involving habitat creation and restoration activities can be seen in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5: Area of land directly and indirectly benefitting from habitat creation and restoration activities (hectares)

Type of benefit	Habitat creation	Habitat restoration	Both	N/A	Unknown	Total area
Direct benefits (ha)	12,517	40,303	11,230	55,781	2,486	122,318
Indirect benefits (ha)	85,675	105,798	33,069	106,718	187,565	518,823
Total area (ha)	98,192	146,100	44,299	162,499	190,051	641,141

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=965 sites). Please note that all figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. These data relate to Table 3.2 in Round 1. In this table, N/A refers to where projects stated that their activity was neither habitat creation nor restoration, and Unknown is where the nature of the environmental action was left blank.

Table 4.6: Distance of land directly and indirectly benefitting from habitat creation and restoration activities (kilometres)

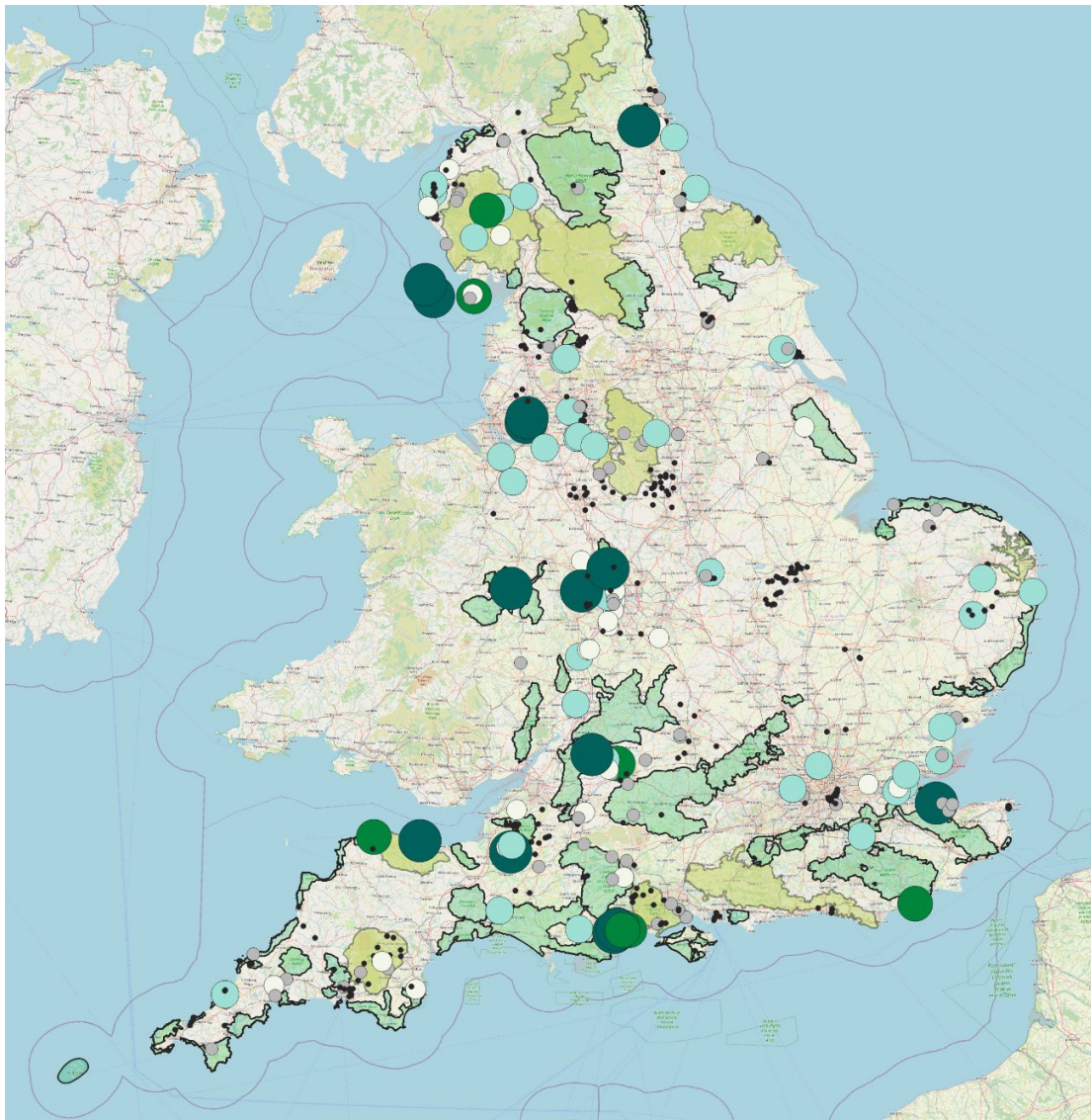
Type of benefit	Habitat creation	Habitat restoration	Both	N/A	Unknown	Total distance
Direct benefits (km)	40	177	22	340	9	587
Indirect benefits (km)	13	133	40	36	94	317
Total area (km)	54	310	62	376	103	904

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=965 sites). Please note that all figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. These data relate to Table 3.2 in Round 1. In this table, N/A refers to where projects stated that their activity was neither habitat creation nor restoration, and Unknown is where the nature of the environmental action was left blank.

The geographical area over which projects have had direct and indirect benefits of all nature conservation and restoration activity in hectares and kilometres is also depicted in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 below. All analysis undertaken in this report includes all project locations as provided through the GRCF Round 2 data collection app. Where maps are presented throughout this report, National Parks and AONBs are also displayed.

Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 contextualise the reach and impact of GRCF Round 2 and illustrate project site placement alongside key areas of environmental importance across England. Moreover, projects were able to provide the length of works if linear (in kilometres).

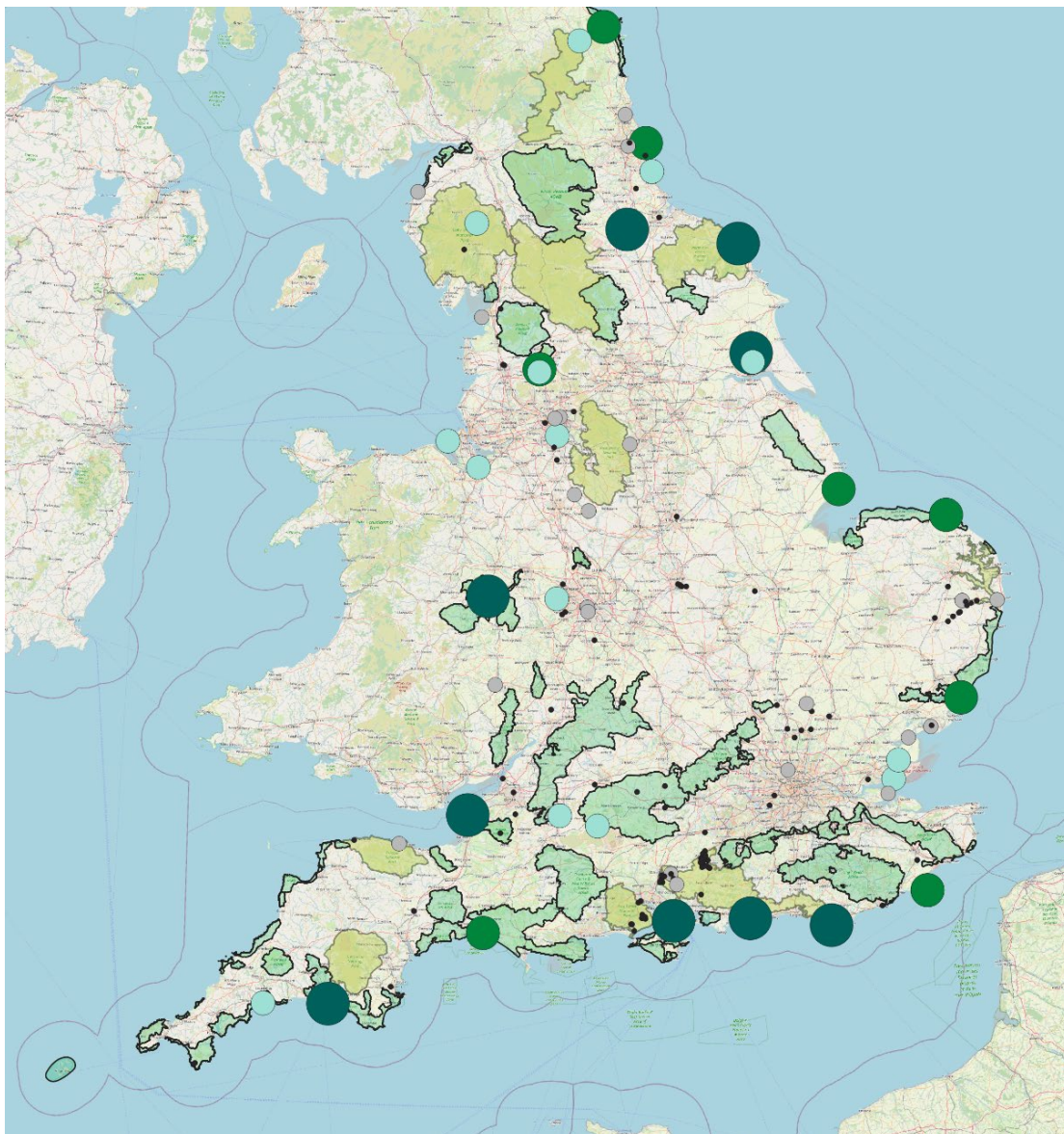
Figure 4.1: Direct benefit of nature conservation and restoration activities (hectares)



- 0 - 10
 - 10 - 50
 - 50 - 100
 - 100 - 500
 - 500 - 1000
 - Over 1000 hectares
- National Parks England
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Base: 122,318ha of direct conservation and restoration activities.

Figure 4.2: Direct benefit of nature conservation and restoration activity (kilometres)



- 0 - 1
- 1 - 5
- 5 - 10
- 10 - 20
- Over 20 Km
- National Parks England
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Base: 587km of direct conservation and restoration activities.

Table 4.7: Direct benefit of all nature conservation and restoration activities (hectares and kilometres), by region

Region	Area benefitted (ha)	% of area benefitted	Distance benefitted (km)	% of distance benefitted
North West	63,841	52%	112	19%
South East	25,918	21%	122	21%
South West	18,815	15%	94	16%
West Midlands	8,811	7%	67	11%
North East	1,976	2%	82	14%
East of England	1,330	1%	50	9%
Yorkshire and the Humber	570	<1%	39	7%
East Midlands	468	<1%	16	3%
London	589	<1%	4	1%
Total	122,318	N/A	587	N/A

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=965 sites). Please note that all figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. These data relate to Table 3.3 in Round 1.

Tree Planting

As a direct result of GRCF funding, 1,708,520 trees were planted in England across 693 sites (see Table 4.7 below). Within GRCF Round 2, 54 projects have planted 616,811 trees. This action directly and considerably contributes to the UK Government’s aim of having 12 per cent woodland cover across England by 2050 (as outlined in the 2021 [England Trees Action Plan](#)) to meet net zero targets.

Previous monitoring data in January 2023 suggested that 224,620 trees had been planted, which means that 392,191 trees were planted between January 2023 and August 2023. This increase aligns with tree-planting season (November to March) as well as project feedback which suggested that considerable tree-planting activity was undertaken towards the end of project delivery. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of projects planting trees, which has increased from 32 projects to 54 since the Second Interim Report in January 2023. In total, tree planting was carried out on just over one third of sites (326/965 sites or 34 per cent).

Table 4.7: Number of trees planted and number of sites and projects planting trees, by project size

Project size	Total trees planted Round 2	Number of sites planting trees Round 2	Number of projects planting trees Round 2	Programme total trees	Programme total sites
Medium	146,238	121	35	259,365	234
Large	470,573	205	19	1,449,155	459
Total	616,811	326	54	1,708,520	693

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=965 sites, 85 projects). These data relate to Table 3.12 in Round 1.

As illustrated in Table 4.8 below, two in five trees were planted in the North West (42 per cent), just over a quarter were planted in the South West (26 per cent), and one tenth (11 per cent) were planted in Yorkshire and the Humber.

The large number of trees planted in the North West and South West is due to considerable tree-planting activity by the project 'Delivering upland landscapes for nature, climate and people' (OL-20-07926) delivered by the National Trust. This is also the largest funded project. This project planted 272,465 trees across the North West, South West, and West Midlands, accounting for 44 per cent of the total trees planted.

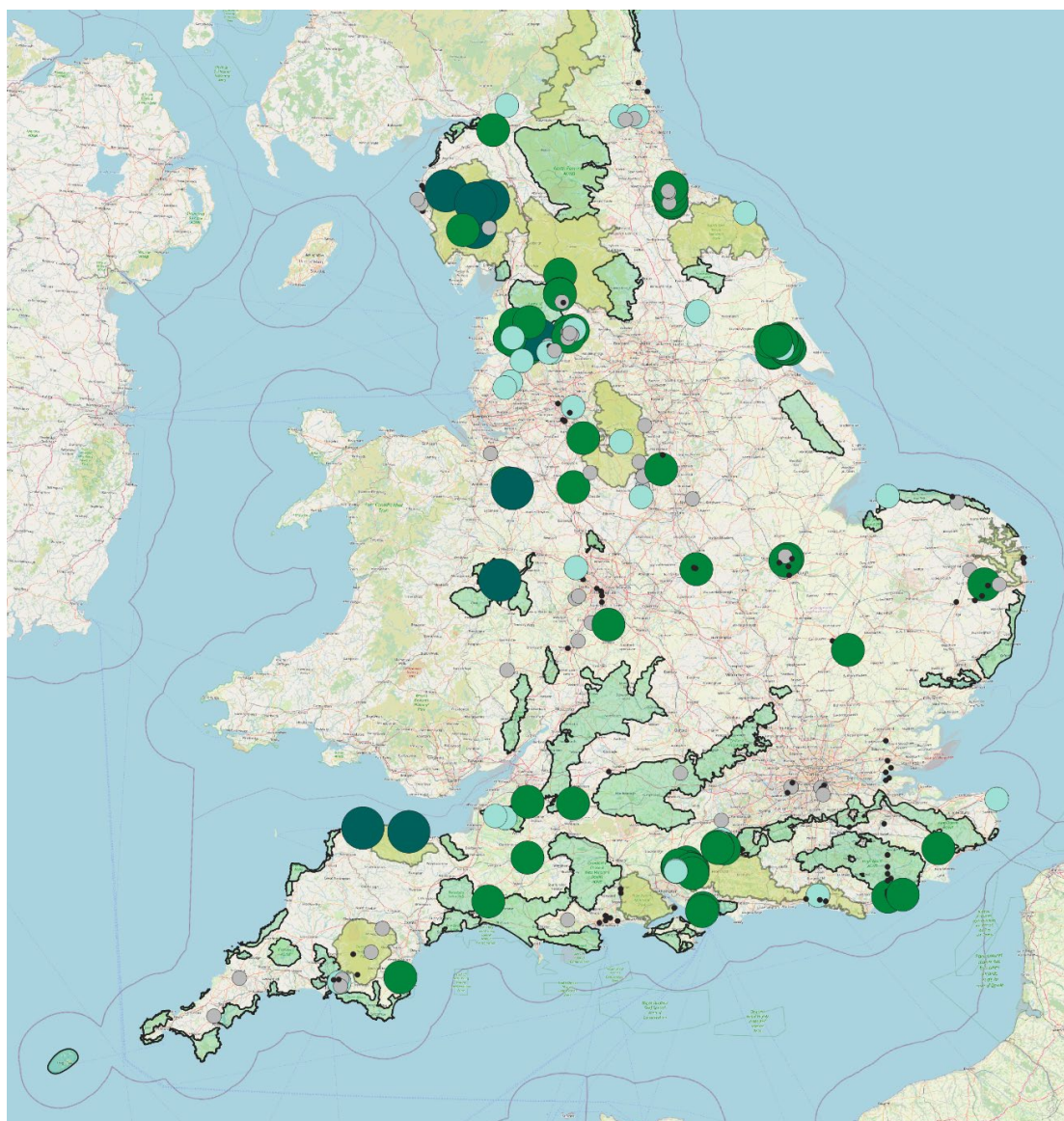
Table 4.8: Number of trees planted in Round 2, by region

Region	Number of trees planted	Percentage of trees planted
North West	259,322	42%
South West	159,430	26%
Yorkshire and the Humber	70,433	11%
South East	49,396	8%
West Midlands	33,941	6%
North East	24,032	4%
East of England	10,528	2%
East Midlands	8,807	1%
London	922	0%
Total	616,811	100%

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=616,811 trees). These data relate to Table 3.14 in Round 1.

Figure 4.3 below shows the geographical distribution of trees planted by GRCF Round 2 projects.

Figure 4.3: Number of trees planted, by geography



- 1 - 100
 - 100 - 500
 - 500 - 1000
 - 1000 - 10000
 - Over 10000 trees
-
- National Parks England
 - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=616,811 trees).

Projects which engaged in tree-planting activities provided data on tree species in open-text responses. These data are available for 80 per cent of sites which planted

trees (261/326 sites). These data are manually coded in line with species groups provided by the [Forestry Commission's Tree Species](#) list. Since there are a number of tree species within conservation actions which detail tree-planting activity, it was not possible to provide exact estimates of the number of each tree species planted. The favoured approach has been to report the number of sites planting each species group. Where possible, future funding programmes should ensure that where projects are reporting on tree planting, monitoring systems require them to stipulate how many trees of which species they have planted. This will enable additional natural capital calculations to take place, further evidencing the wider environmental impact of project delivery.

The data suggest that sorbus was the most common tree species group, which includes rowan, crab apple, and hawthorn, and was planted on 148 sites (Table 4.9 below). Varieties of cherry trees were planted on 142 sites, and hazels and oaks were planted on 126 sites each. Tree types included in the 'Other' category below include fruit trees, juniper, magnolia, and other shrubs. The majority of these sites had planted mixed species, with 52 per cent of sites which provided species data (138/261 sites) planting five or more species types.

Trees in the sorbus family are commonly known to mitigate soil erosion, cherry and hazel trees provide effective carbon sequestration, and oak trees are known to support other plants in close proximity, enhancing biodiversity. Overall, the range of trees planted within GRCF Round 2, as well as the techniques used to plant them (e.g. through community and volunteer events), suggests that project delivery has aligned with the 'Right Tree, Right Place agenda' and planted trees in response to local needs. This indicates that tree planting in GRCF Round 2 has supported a wide range of 25YEP goals (including the aims of improving air quality, supporting thriving plants and wildlife, and increasing engagement with the natural environment).

Table 4.9: Number of GRCF sites planting trees, by species group

Tree species group	Number of sites
Sorbus	148
Cherry	143
Hazel	126
Oak	126
Birch	121
Maple	97
Alder	87
Willow	70
Dogwood	50
Dog rose	50
Holly	42
Lime	38
Beech	35
Pine	27
Chestnut	23
Poplar	16
Other	130
Total sites planting trees	326
Total sites with species data	261

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=326 sites). These data relate to Table 3.15 in Round 1.

4.1.2. Project Reflections

This subsection explores project reflections on the impact of their activity of nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions. Project reflections draw on findings from the final round of thematic workshops, the Wave 2 survey, and project-level evaluation reports.

As outlined in the section above, GRCF Round 2 projects undertook a wide range of conservation and restoration actions throughout their delivery. When asked to reflect on the impact that their activity had had on nature, projects provided examples of a range of conservation and restoration benefits and nature-based solutions delivered. For example, project-level reports highlight:

- **Urban Green Newcastle's Beelines North East: Bringing the buzz back to the city project** planted 41,975 bulbs, created six wetland scrapes, created 1,815sqm of pollinator-friendly borders, created/restored 18.2ha of grassland, and planted 3,700 trees. This allowed the project to establish eight exemplar sites on which best practice in managing sites for pollinators is demonstrated across a range of different habitats and site settings.
- **The Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's Hertfordshire's Living Rivers project** restored 6.4ha of riverbank, reintroduced 130 water voles to the River Beane, and undertook a coordinated approach to control and monitor minks to improve the resilience of water vole populations.
- **The Somerset Wildlife Trust's Out of the Ashes, regenerating Somerset's woodland reserve project** improved 379ha of Mendip and Polden Hills nature reserves by clearing dead, dying and diseased trees and restocking them. As part of this process, the project also installed bat boxes to create surrogate habitats to replace trees and manage dead and dying trees to sensitively generate new habitats for insects and other species. This has allowed the Trust to better manage the woodland glades and interconnecting meadows in a resilience-focused way.
- **Leicester City Council's Saving the Saffron Brook project** restored 3.1km of land along the River Soar and 2.2ha of grassland and created 1.3ha of wetland. Additionally, the project planted 2,807 trees, cleared 418 black rubbish bags, and installed bird/bat boxes, kingfisher tubes, bug hotels, and otter holts. This has supported the transformation of the modified river ecosystem in a key strategic wildlife corridor.

These examples highlight how a range of activities at GRCF project sites have symbiotically created improved nature across England.

The physical creation, restoration or building of nature-based solutions was described by projects in final evaluation workshops and project-level reports as helping eNGOs to develop sustainable infrastructure. This commonly included activities such as river bank stabilisation, the installation of natural flood management, pond creation, scrape creation, the creation of floodplain wetland mosaics, and hedgerow planting. This type of activity has allowed projects to rewild areas in which there has been a detrimental human impact, reintroduce and protect native species, improve site and water quality, ecosystems, and management, reduce flood risk, and improve connectivity between habitats. For example:

'We are already seeing new frogspawn and colonisation of new birds on the wetlands. Otter spraint has been detected throughout the catchment, and hay rattle sown in the autumn is now coming into seed with a concomitant reduction in coarse grasses. The areas along the riverbank which were pollarded showed an increase in understory plants in the spring due to increased light levels, and the pollarded trees are already

showing good regeneration.’ (Project Response, Wave 2 Survey)

This suggests that GRCF Round 2 projects have delivered positive impacts on biodiversity, habitat quality, and ecosystem health across England. They have enhanced the projects’ local natural environment, making it more resilient and better equipped to support a wide range of species.

As highlighted in [Section 3.5](#), GRCF Round 2 projects frequently reported that they have strengthened working relationships with a range of partners as a result of their project delivery. Where projects undertook activity related to nature conservation and restoration and/or nature-based solutions, projects in final workshops highlighted that said activity has resulted in longer-term multi-stakeholder engagement in local nature activities, including partners such as landowners, local authorities, schools, and other local eNGOs. In a minority of cases, projects described successfully securing private investment to sustain their project delivery:

**‘The wider success was around the developing market, involving buyers and sellers for biodiversity net gain. [We were] successful in bringing private finance into our natural recovery activity and it opens the door to delivering other projects.’
(Final Workshop Project Response)**

As is explored further in [Section 6](#), this is a positive finding because it demonstrates that in many cases, GRCF Round 2 has allowed projects to establish good foundations with key and local stakeholders. This will encourage greater long-term collaboration to continue supporting local nature.

Whilst projects have extensively fed back throughout the evaluation that their delivery has had a positive impact on local nature, it is important to consider to what extent these impacts can be measured. In reflective workshops, the majority of projects acknowledged that whilst they had delivered outputs as specified in project bids, this is only a short-term measure of success. Some projects reported that tangible impacts were particularly challenging to identify because the delivery timeframe only included one growing season. For example:

‘We struggled to even measure the initial outputs because we were working with flowers which won’t germinate for another year. If we hadn’t got the three-month extension we wouldn’t have even been able to sow the seeds. We did manage to see the growth of grassland indicator species, and without the extension we wouldn’t have even had them.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

Across the Wave 2 survey, most projects delivering against the theme of nature conservation and restoration or nature-based solutions stated that there were additional outcomes that they anticipated achieving in the longer term (84 per cent; 43/51). Where longer-term outcomes related to nature-based impacts (in 74 per cent

of cases; 32/43), projects reported that it would take between five and 25 years for these impacts to be evident.

Projects commonly reported that their activity has enabled them to collect and monitor more data than they have previously been able to do (e.g. through ecological surveys and baseline habitat assessments). This has allowed projects to better understand the initial state of habitats, landscapes, and species populations and measure their delivery progress.

Projects were positive about being able to use GRCF funding for data collection activity, given the consensus that it can be more challenging to secure funding for this type of activity in comparison to activity focused on improvements to habitats and landscapes. Projects' ability to track change due to increased data collection and monitoring will also allow for future comparisons to assess the sustained impact of conservation efforts. This indicates that GRCF Round 2 has enabled projects to measure the impact of their work more effectively than they are typically able to do, which has the potential to deliver longer-term benefits for nature. Staff, volunteer and apprentice/trainee skill development in relation to data collection is explored in more detail in [Section 4.3.2](#).

In many cases, projects are unable to measure and identify the longer-term positive impact of their projects within the timeframe of GRCF project delivery. This is unsurprising when considering the longer-term commitment required to measure the impact of nature-based projects. However, GRCF funding has enabled and encouraged projects to put in place data collection systems to ensure that longer-term impacts on nature can be evidenced. This aligns with broader governmental aims of focusing on and maintaining monitoring delivery progress in alignment with the 2019 [Outcome Indicator Framework](#) to support the 25YEP and the 2023 [Environmental Improvement Plan](#). Flexibility in funding requirements to accommodate eNGOs setting up sustainable practices of data collection that can be used in the longer term should be encouraged and adopted in future funding programmes. This will ensure that short-term, competitive funds can still effectively support nature-based projects.

7.3. Connecting People with Nature

4.2.1. Reported Outcomes

This subsection provides an overview of the GRCF's impact through monitoring system data. This includes engagement with project activity as well as improved or installed visitor infrastructure.

Engagement with Project Activity

Overall, 402,740 people have engaged with 25,036 in-person events across the lifetime of the GRCF. These events have taken place across 1,973 sites across the programme, including 1,173 sites in Round 2. In total, 244,340 people have engaged with 16,779 events held throughout GRCF Round 2 both in person and

online. This directly contributes to the 25YEP's goal of engaging people with the natural environment.

Overall, 99 per cent of events were held in person (16,541/16,779 events), representing 95 per cent of people engaged (232,957/244,340 people). Considering that the GRCF aimed to support the 25YEP's aim of connecting people with nature, a high proportion of face-to-face activity, in nature, is to be expected. Where projects utilised online activity, this was typically undertaken to broaden their reach. For example, within the Marine Conservation Society's Inspiring Blue Recovery through Connecting People with the Ocean project, they recruited an online youth panel with representation across England. As will be explored further in [Section 4.2.2](#), online engagement could have been used more extensively across projects to engage new audiences.

The figures for online activities exclude those events which were registered as social media engagements, which account for 164 events, engaging with 155,363 people. Social media engagements are considered to be an all-digital engagement activity which is not considered to be interactive, including social media posts, blogs, and e-newsletters. The number of people engaging with social media activity would account for 39 per cent of all engagements if included in the figures for total people engaged (155,363/399,703 people). The following analysis (Table 4.10) excludes social media engagement from any totals.

Including all types of in-person, online, and social media engagements, Round 2 has held 16,943 events, engaging 399,703 people. Please note that these include volunteering activity and regular project events and sessions. This may mean that this total includes duplicate events and people engaged.

Table 4.10: Number of events and people engaged (excluding social media)

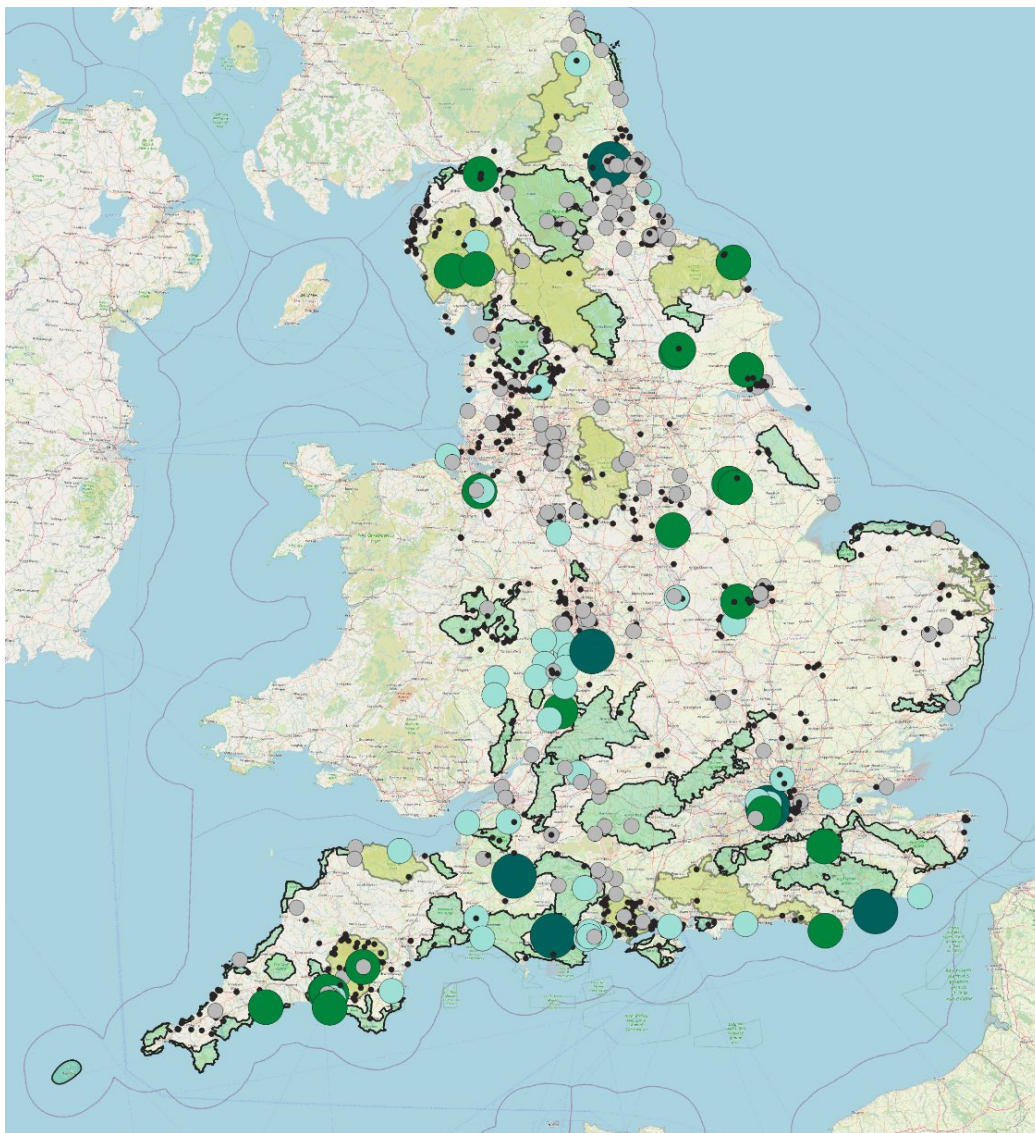
Event type	Round 2 events	% of Round 2 events	Total people engaged Round 2	% of people engaged Round 2	Programme total events	Programme total people
In-person events	16,541	99%	232,957	95%	25,036	342,357
Online events	238	1%	11,383	5%	1,212	60,383
Total in-person and online events	16,779	100%	244,340	100%	26,248	402,740

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=16,779 events). These data relate to Table 3.19 in Round 1.

The geographical area over which projects have held in-person events is depicted in Figure 4.4, with the number of people engaging with these events presented in

Figure 4.5 (both figures below). All analysis undertaken in this report includes all project locations as provided through the GRCF Round 2 data collection app.

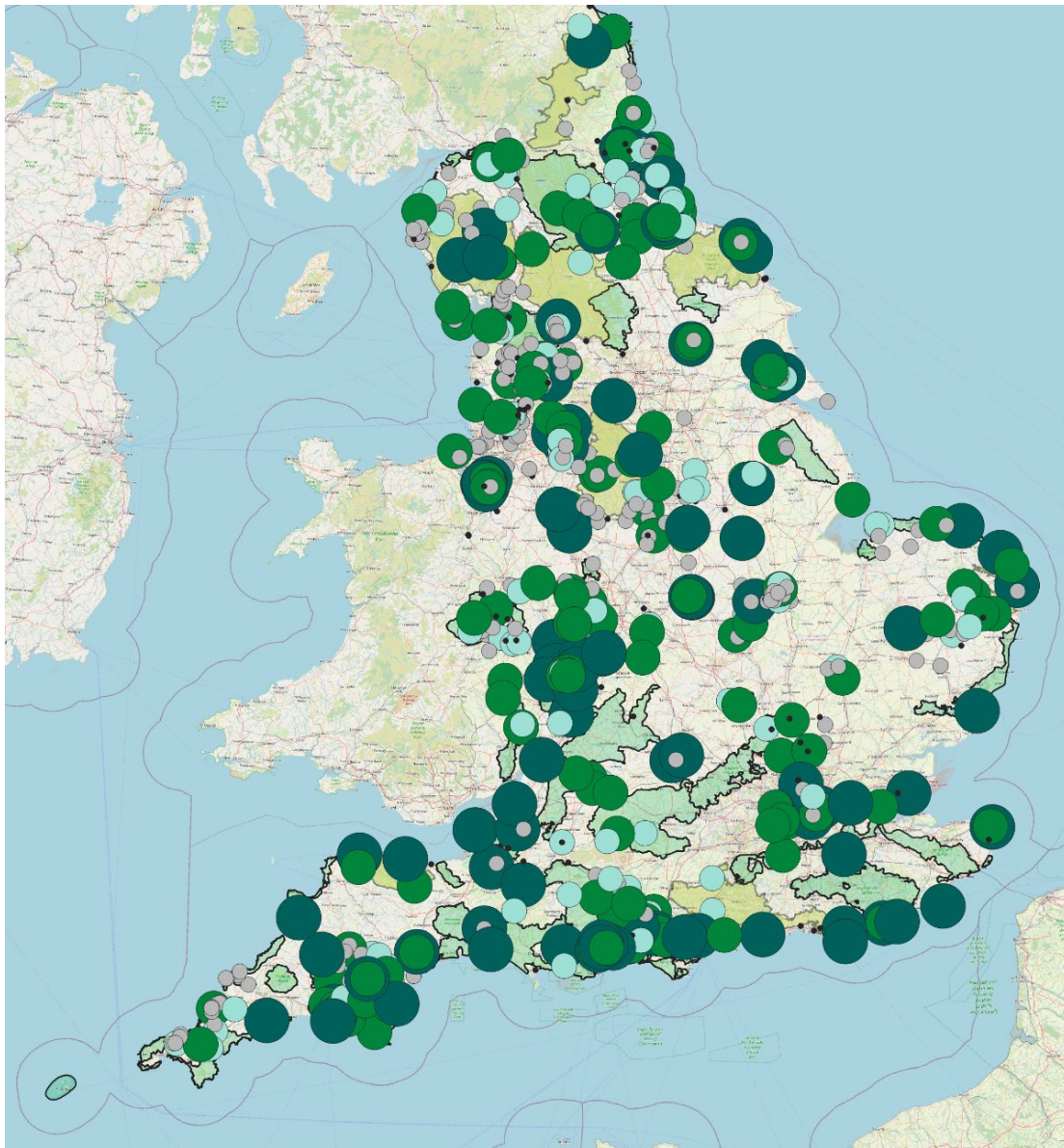
Figure 4.4: Number of in-person events held, by geography



- 1 - 10
- 10 - 50
- 50 - 100
- 100 - 200
- Over 200 events
- National Parks England
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=16,541 in-person events).

Figure 4.5: Number of people attending in-person events, by geography



- 1 - 10
- 10 - 50
- 50 - 100
- 100 - 500
- Over 500 people
- National Parks England
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=232,957 people attending in-person events).

The geographical data, along with the regional data shown below in Table 4.11, suggest that the South West has held the most events, accounting for 22 per cent of all events held (3,633/16,541 in-person events). However, the North West engaged the most people in in-person events, with 48,830 people engaged in person over the course of the projects (21 per cent). The high concentration of events and people in the South West and North West broadly aligns with the high number of sites in each region.

Table 4.11: Number of in-person events and people engaged, by region

Region	Number of events	Percentage of events	Number of people engaged	Percentage of people engaged	Programme total events	Programme total people
South West	3,633	22%	40,145	17%	4,922	54,567
North East	3,120	19%	31,649	14%	3,580	36,003
North West	2,554	15%	48,830	21%	4,426	73,382
West Midlands	2,059	12%	25,255	11%	3,218	42,423
South East	1,582	10%	42,796	18%	2,170	48,216
East Midlands	1,260	8%	11,106	5%	2,482	31,298
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,020	6%	12,010	5%	1,669	21,005
London	858	5%	7,828	3%	1,482	17,248
East of England	455	3%	13,338	6%	1,065	18,010
Total	16,541	N/A	232,957	N/A	25,036	342,357

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (Round 2 n=16,541 in-person events and GRCF total n=25,036 events). These data relate to Table 3.21 in Round 1. Please note that programme totals may not equal the total, as some events were listed as 'Unknown' in Round 1.

Almost half of all events in Round 2 were described as targeting a specific group (47 per cent or 7,840/16,541 in-person events). Some of these engagement activities were targeted at particular groups who might be less likely to engage with nature, including people from deprived backgrounds, people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), people who are Black, Asian or from another ethnic minority, asylum seekers, people with disabilities or poor mental health, and women ([People and Nature Survey](#), Natural England, 2022).

Table 4.12 below sets out the number of engagement activities which were targeted at one or more of these groups. Notably, nine per cent (1,455/16,541 in-person events) targeted people from a deprived background or NEET, with a further six per cent (1,038/16,541 in-person events) targeting people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. It is understood that the GRCF aimed to engage new and diverse audiences to engage with nature, in line with 25YEP goals. Table 4.12 indicates that efforts were made to engage a wide range of underrepresented and priority groups.

The exact number of people from targeted groups who engaged with GRCF Round 2 activity cannot be confirmed, as projects were required to report how many people attended events and whether these events were targeted at underrepresented groups or other priority groups. Monitoring data collection did not include the demographics of all people engaging. Future funding programmes should consider how evidence can be gathered to gauge engagement with new and diverse audiences and what support and guidance projects would need in order to provide these data.

Table 4.12: Engagement activities targeted at people from underrepresented or other priority groups

Targeted group	Number of events	Percentage of events
Schoolchildren (Under 18)	2,741	17%
Young People (18–25)	2,206	13%
Deprived Backgrounds or Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	1,455	9%
Disabilities or Additional Learning Needs (ALN)	1,038	6%
Mental Health	1,012	6%
Asylum Seekers/Refugees	519	3%
Caring Responsibilities	165	1%
Black, Asian or Another Ethnic Minority	70	<1%
Women	44	<1%

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=16,541 in-person events). These data relate to Table 3.23 in Round 1. Please note that the percentages do not total 100 per cent, as some events have targeted multiple groups.

A range of activities were carried out during events. The most common types of events were those which involved conservation work (4,191 events) such as tree planting, scrub clearance, or community litter-picking days (Table 4.13 below). Additionally, 1,944 events involved some element of training, such as workshops on

particular species or training in particular skills for volunteers, schoolchildren, or members of the public.

Table 4.13: Types of event

Event type	Number of events	Percentage of events	Number of people	Percentage of people
Conservation work (e.g. tree planting, scrub clearance)	4,191	25%	33,709	14%
Regular events (e.g. volunteer meetings, regular clubs or sessions)	2,005	12%	14,669	6%
Workshops/training	1,944	12%	14,486	6%
School events	1,940	12%	41,209	18%
Guided walks or talks	1,559	9%	22,709	10%
Citizen science projects	1,433	9%	10,678	5%
Activity days	1,376	8%	38,680	17%
Details not given	1,801	11%	43,734	19%
Other	292	2%	13,083	6%
Total	16,541	N/A	232,957	N/A

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=16,541 in-person events). These data relate to Table 3.23 in Round 1.

Visitor Infrastructure Improved

A wide range of infrastructure has been installed or improved through the GRCF. **On a programme level, Round 1 and Round 2 of the GRCF have installed 609 elements of infrastructure across 230 sites.** In Round 2, 50 projects detailed works carried out over 190 sites, totalling 416 elements of infrastructure. Improvement or installation of infrastructure includes 192km of footpaths, 37km of fences, and 8km of boardwalks. Table 4.14 below details the type of infrastructure improved.

This suggests that signage or interpretation was the most common type of infrastructure improvement based on the number of sites. The number of signage or interpretation improvements has increased considerably since the January 2023 interim report, suggesting that they have been installed towards the end of project activities, supporting project legacy by raising awareness of project delivery and engaging visitors on sites.

Table 4.14: Infrastructure improvements

Type of infrastructure improvement	Elements of infrastructure Round 2	Sites Round 2	Distance (km) Round 2	Programme total elements of infrastructure	Programme total sites
Signage or interpretation	102	90	-	189	158
Footpaths	111	73	192	233	142
Fences	52	44	37	127	108
Accessibility changes (e.g. vehicle accessibility, ramps or rails)	26	22	-	85	72
Bridge(s)	19	18	-	28	27
Boardwalks	15	13	8	30	24
Shelters or hides	11	10	-	27	20
Amenities (e.g. transport infrastructure, toilets, catering)	13	7	-	65	46
Other	67	49	-	223	138
Total	416	190	N/A	851	383

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=190 sites). These data relate to Table 3.24 in Round 1. Please note that columns may sum to greater than the total, as some activities reported more than one type of improvement.

In addition, 67 sites registered 'Other' types of infrastructure, which included improvements to dry-stone walls and viewing platforms and the installation of technology such as a footfall counter and webcams. Projects which noted improving accessibility to sites included extending and improving car parks to increase access and capacity, improving entranceways, and creating seating and raised planters.

It is also possible that figures for fencing include fencing for conservation purposes as well as fencing for visitor purposes, as it was not possible to disaggregate the different types of fencing from the information provided in the monitoring data.

Table 4.15 below sets out the types of improvements carried out, distinguishing between new elements of infrastructure which have been installed as well as

maintenance to existing infrastructure. Details on the types of infrastructure improvements have been manually coded from monitoring information submitted by projects.

Table 4.15: Number of infrastructure improvements, by type

Type of infrastructure improvement	New	Existing	Unknown	Total
Signage or interpretation	90	3	10	102
Footpaths	33	86	1	111
Fences	40	13	3	52
Accessibility changes (e.g. vehicle accessibility, ramps or rails)	16	10	1	26
Bridge(s)	11	10	1	19
Boardwalks	12	7	1	15
Shelters or hides	11	1	0	11
Amenities (e.g. transport infrastructure, toilets, catering)	11	2	1	13
Other	39	27	5	67
Total	263	159	23	416

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=416 elements of infrastructure). These data relate to Table 3.25 in Round 1. Please note that columns may sum to greater than the total, as some activities were reported to include both new installations as well as improvements to existing infrastructure. These infrastructure activities are included within ‘new’ and ‘existing’ figures but are only included once in total figures.

4.2.2. Project Reflections

This subsection explores project reflections on the impact of their activity of connecting people with nature and how effective this aspect of delivery was. Project reflections draw on findings from the final round of thematic workshops, the Wave 2 survey, and project-level evaluation reports.

As illustrated by Table 4.16 below, all surveyed projects were able to connect people with nature through GRCF Round 2, and the majority of projects stated that they had done so to a large extent (78 per cent; 57/74). The data also indicate that all surveyed projects except for one felt as though they had engaged with new and diverse audiences through their project, albeit to a lesser extent, with over half of projects (59 per cent; 43/74) reporting that they had somewhat engaged with new and diverse audiences. This suggests that whilst a range of activities to connect

people with nature were offered, targeted activity to engage people disconnected from nature was less commonplace. As will be explored below, where engagement with new and diverse audiences was limited or non-existent, projects reported that they did not have sufficient time in project delivery to ‘meaningfully’ engage with target groups.

Overall, this suggests that whilst GRCF Round 2 has effectively contributed to the 25YEP’s aim of broadly connecting people with nature, more time, resource and/or guidance may have been needed to ensure that GRCF project delivery aligned with sector-wide efforts to engage new and diverse audiences.

Table 4.16: Project reflections on their ability to connect people with nature and engage new and diverse audiences through project delivery

Survey question	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
To what extent do you think you’ve been able to connect people with nature through the project?	78%	22%	0%
To what extent do you think your project activities have engaged new and diverse audiences?	40%	59%	1%

Base: Wave 2 survey (n=74).

As highlighted in Section 4.2.1, across the lifetime of GRCF Round 2, projects undertook a wide range of activities seeking to connect people with nature. As detailed in project workshops, Wave 2 survey responses, and report feedback, these included:

- Nature walks and guided tours in natural areas, such as parks, reserves, or wildlife habitats, to educate local people about nature ‘on their doorstep’ and help local communities to understand the cultural and historical significance of natural areas.
- Outdoor workshops and training providing training sessions for volunteers and community members on biodiversity, nature conservation, habitat management, and wildlife monitoring.
- Citizen science in which participants collect data on wildlife, plants or ecosystems to contribute to the project’s own data collection and ecological assessments.
- Wildlife watching and birdwatching, offering opportunities for people to observe and learn about wildlife, including birdwatching events and wildlife-spotting sessions.
- Planting activities engaging volunteers, staff, and other local people in the planting of trees and bulbs to create and restore habitats and other landscapes.

- School programmes in which projects developed activities for young people in educational settings, including nature-focused site visits and classroom activities. In some cases, these were curriculum-based; in others, Forest School-type activity was offered.
- Creative activities encouraging participants to express their connection with nature through art, photography, and other creative projects.
- Family and community events to encourage communities to take part in outdoor activity (e.g. outdoor picnics and wildlife-themed games).
- Gardening initiatives to involve communities in gardening projects, including planting native species, creating pollinator-friendly gardens, and maintaining community green spaces.
- Nature-based well-being activities promoting the mental and physical health benefits of spending time in nature through mindfulness sessions, hiking, and other outdoor activity.
- Public engagement and outreach through a range of forums such as social media, local websites, and public events to raise awareness of the importance of nature conservation and encourage community involvement.

Reflecting on what had worked well when connecting people with nature, projects commonly reported that by undertaking a range of different activities, they were able to engage different people with different interests and needs, which resulted in projects gaining momentum in local areas:

‘We did a range of activities and events to try and make sure we could work with as many people as possible. We did geocaching, attended community events, and worked with local schools in the area as well. We did everything we could to engage with the community. [As a result] everyone seemed to know about the project and what was going on with it.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

As reported in [Second Interim GRCF Round 2 Report](#), many projects successfully employed citizen science methods in their GRCF Round 2 project delivery. In interim and final workshops and the Wave 2 survey, projects reported that by engaging people in citizen science activity, individuals became more connected with nature because of their knowledge of the local environment and how to conserve it; therefore, the feeling of environmental stewardship increased. One project said:

‘By educating people about nature and showing them the wide variety of species that we share our local environment with, we have been able to connect people. The citizen science aspect has shown how much of a positive impact we can have, giving hope for the connection people have with nature.’ (Project Response, Wave 2 Survey)

The use of GRCF monies to recruit for new outreach or volunteer coordinator roles was also widely recognised by projects as a key enabler of effective engagement-based activity. Projects described new outreach and coordinator roles as enabling them to better reach new community groups and audiences and better target volunteer efforts towards project delivery. In many cases, these roles also enabled eNGOs to better accommodate the needs of underserved communities. One project said:

‘Having a new volunteer coordinator through the project meant we had someone who could specifically look to bring in new people and groups and we managed this with great success. We ran groups on Mondays and Tuesdays each week, together with a regular [community group] on a Thursday. For the first time, we ran a Saturday group once a month to enable people who worked to get involved. We ran one-off volunteering days for business groups and not-for-profits. We ran groups for people living with dementia and disadvantaged groups such as [a family-focused charity]. Over 9,500 hours of volunteer time was given during the project, more than doubling our previous best tally.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

Where projects did not recruit for new outreach or coordinator roles, they were frequently working with partners who had considerable experience of engaging in certain local areas and/or with certain groups. This allowed projects to harness expertise available within their partnerships and learn how best to engage with specific groups as well as the appropriate channels through which to engage them. In many cases, projects reported that as a result of how successfully they have connected people with nature through their partners, these partnerships and/or routes to engagement will continue in the longer term.

When looking to engage new and diverse audiences, projects frequently sought to reach out to target groups via outreach officers, volunteer coordinators, and/or partners with specific expertise or knowledge of said groups. Working with specialist partners was perceived by projects to be the most effective approach to engage with new and more diverse audiences through the GRCF. Specialist partners such as local or national health charities, disability groups, youth groups, older-age care organisations, and networks dedicated to individuals from a range of different ethnic backgrounds allowed projects to build on existing and trusted relationships that partners had with target communities.

Working with specialist partners also allowed eNGOs to learn how to better engage with target communities and better consider how to better support inclusive engagement with project activity. For example, some projects consulted with their specialist partner as to how to make more inclusive and easier-to-read booklets, websites, and other educational resources, whilst others offered transport to ensure that project sites could be accessible for all. As previously reported, projects found that communities need to be ‘brought with you’ to positively engage local people and that transport is a key way of enabling this. Throughout the evaluation, projects

highlighted that older-age care services and schools often do not have the resources to travel to project sites, particularly in more remote, rural areas.

Where projects did not engage new and diverse audiences or found it difficult to do so, this was typically because projects felt that they did not have sufficient time or resource to effectively target groups who were not already engaged with nature in some way.

In most cases, projects reported offering a wide range of opportunities in the hope that these would encourage some new audiences to engage, but having limited ability to check how well these approaches had worked. Mass but untargeted activity appears to have worked well in generally connecting people with nature; however, it is difficult to state how many people engaged in project delivery were new to this type of nature-based activity.

Overall, this suggests that the GRCF has successfully enabled projects to connect local people with nature, aligning with the [25YEP](#) aim for 'more people, from all backgrounds, to engage with and spend time in green and blue spaces in their everyday lives'. However, to improve future programmes' alignment with the aims of the 25YEP, future programmes should encourage applicants to consider how they will reach new audiences and how this can be tracked to ensure that the sector is as broad and inclusive as possible.

7.4. Resilience and Employment

4.3.1. Reported Outcomes

This subsection provides an overview of the GRCF's impact on organisational resilience and employment. This includes a review of data regarding job creation and safeguarding, skills, and training.

Jobs Directly Supported

Overall, Round 1 and Round 2 of the GRCF have directly supported 1,529 jobs, equivalent to 1,053 FTE (Table 4.17 below). In total, 876 jobs have been directly supported across GRCF Round 2 projects, equivalent to 580 FTE jobs.

Jobs have been supported on 158 sites. Large projects account for 59 per cent of all roles and FTE (516/876 roles and 343/580 FTE), and medium-sized projects the remaining 41 per cent (360/876 roles and 237/580 FTE).

Table 4.17: Jobs directly supported by GRCF projects, by project size

Project size	Total roles Round 2	% of all roles Round 2	Total FTE Round 2	% of all FTE Round 2	Total sites Round 2	Programme total roles	Programme total FTE
Medium	360	41%	237	41%	88	615	415
Large	516	59%	343	59%	70	905	639
Total	876	N/A	580	N/A	158	1,529	1,053

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=876 jobs).

Of the 876 roles, nearly two thirds were created for GRCF Round 2 (550 roles or 63 per cent), 193 were existing roles protected from redundancy (22 per cent), and 133 roles involved partial support with full cost recovery (15 per cent). Jobs created account for nearly three quarters of the total FTE supported, suggesting that new roles may be more likely to have a higher FTE than are existing roles or those partially supported.

Experimental estimates of green jobs in the UK suggest that between 2015 and 2020, employment in eNGOs increased by around 6,000 FTE, with the total jobs estimated to be 33,700 FTE in 2020 ([Experimental estimates of green jobs, UK](#), ONS, 2023). This suggests that GRCF Round 2 has made an important contribution to job creation in eNGOs.

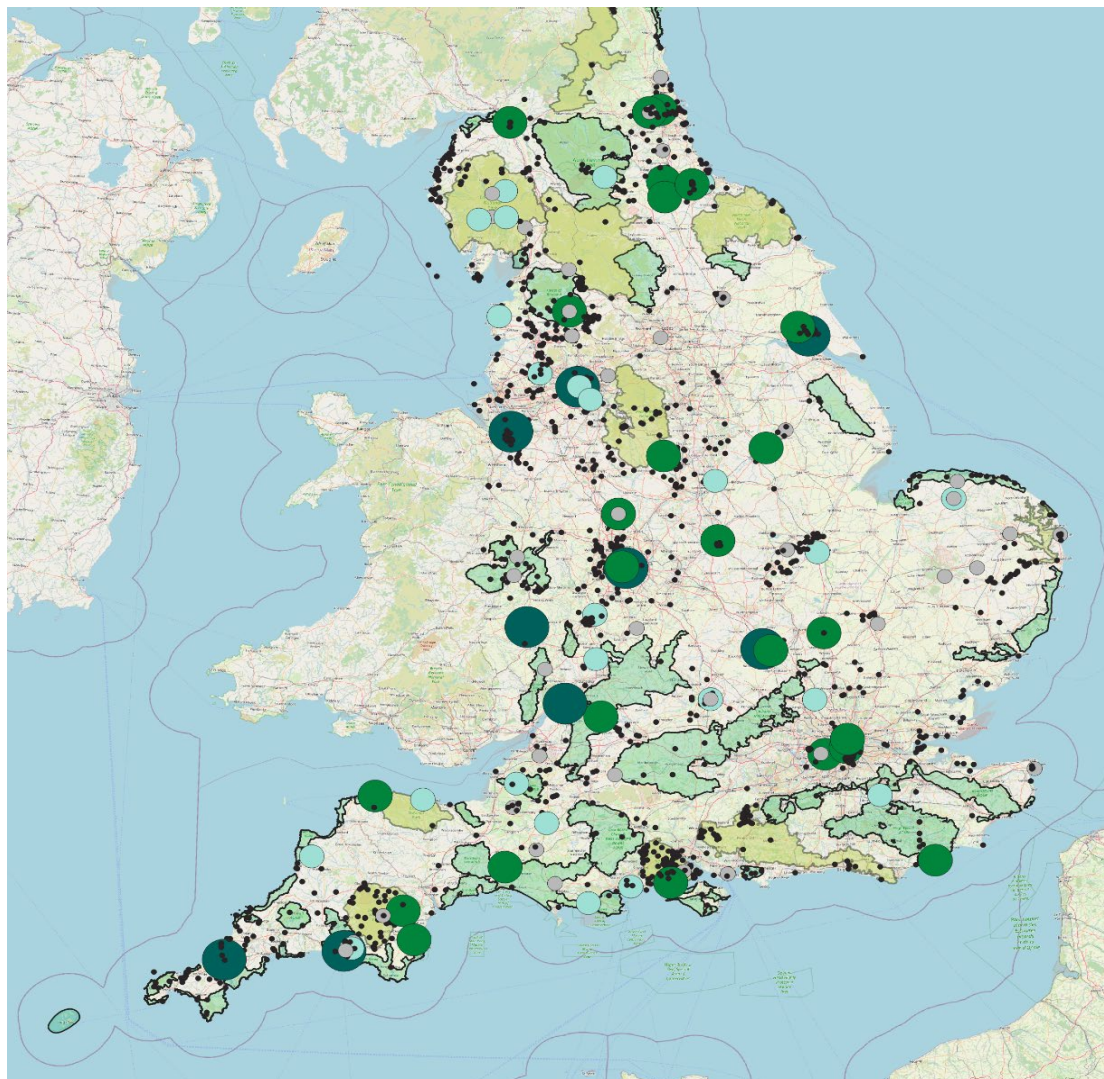
Table 4.18: Jobs directly supported by GRCF projects, by job creation, protection, or partial support

Employment type	Total jobs – roles	Percentage	Total jobs – FTE	Percentage
Role created for GRCF	550	63%	432	74%
Existing role protected from redundancy	193	22%	98	17%
Partial support – full cost recovery	133	15%	50	9%
Total	876	N/A	580	N/A

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=876 jobs).

Figure 4.6 below depicts the geographical spread of all jobs created as a result of GRCF Round 2.

Figure 4.6: Jobs supported by GRCF, by geography (FTE)



- Up to 1 FTE role
- 1 - 3
- 3 - 5
- 5 - 10
- Over 10 FTE roles
- National Parks England
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Base: 580 FTE roles.

Table 4.19 below sets out the regional breakdown of jobs supported through the GRCF, which reflects the geographical locations of projects and sites. This suggests that over a quarter (27 per cent or 235 roles) of roles were located in the South West, with only five per cent in Yorkshire and the Humber (44 roles in total).

Table 4.19: Jobs directly supported by GRCF projects, by region

Regional breakdown	Total FTE	Role created for GRCF	Existing role protected from redundancy	Partial support – full cost recovery	Total roles	Percentage of roles
South West	166	145	61	29	235	27%
North West	119	111	21	23	155	18%
North East	63	60	31	8	99	11%
South East	53	55	27	4	86	10%
London	58	21	25	20	66	8%
West Midlands	40	56	10	17	83	9%
East of England	28	42	5	10	57	7%
East Midlands	25	27	7	17	51	6%
Yorkshire and the Humber	29	33	6	5	44	5%
Total	580	550	193	133	876	N/A

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=876 jobs). These data relate to Tables 3.29 and 3.30 in Round 1.

Jobs were supported by lead applicants, project partners, and other freelance or self-employed individuals. The monitoring data suggest that the majority of jobs supported were within lead applicant organisations (73 per cent or 639/876 roles), which also had the highest average FTE of 0.68 (Table 4.20 below). Partner organisations employed 25 per cent of roles (222/876 roles), with an average of 0.62 FTE, with freelance and self-employed staff accounting for only one per cent of staff (six roles), contributing 0.24 FTE to projects on average.

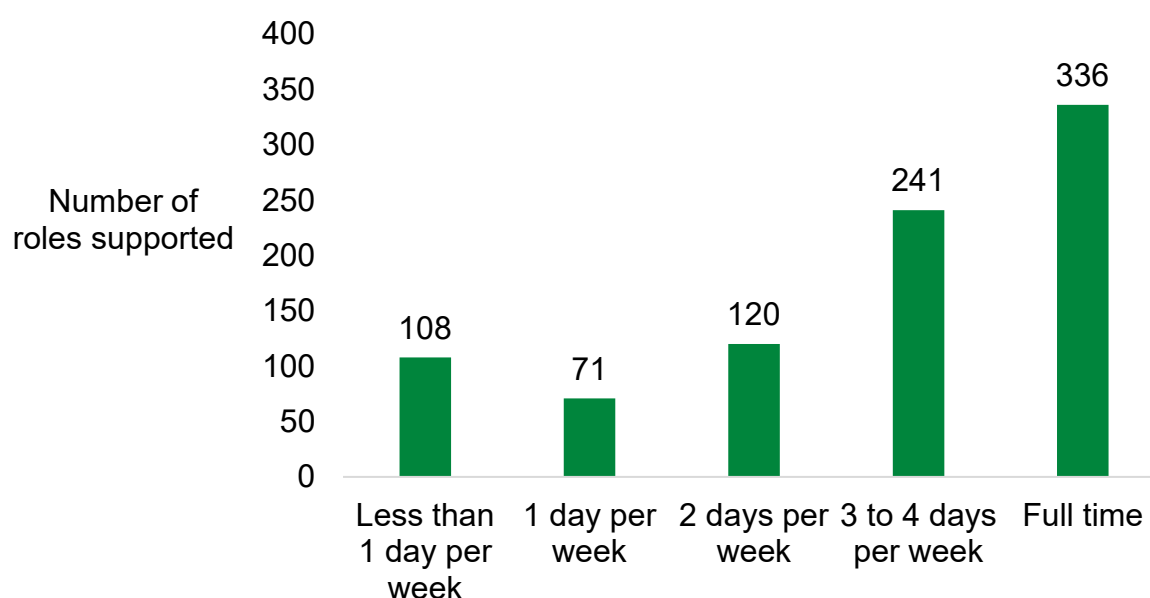
Table 4.20: Jobs directly supported by GRCF projects, by type of employer

Organisation type	Total roles	Percentage of roles	Total jobs FTE	Percentage of FTE	Average FTE
Lead applicant	639	73%	434	75%	0.68
Partner	222	25%	137	24%	0.62
Freelance/self-employed	6	1%	1	0%	0.24
Other	9	1%	8	1%	0.83
Total	876	N/A	580	N/A	0.66

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=876 jobs). These data relate to Table 3.32 in Round 1.

The jobs supported by GRCF Round 2 projects had a range of working hours, with 38 per cent of roles being full-time (336/876 roles) and 28 per cent being posts that were three to four days per week (241/876 roles). Jobs in which staff worked less than one day per week (108 roles or 12 per cent) were mostly jobs protected from redundancy, provided partial support through the GRCF, or freelance roles (Figure 4.7 below).

Figure 4.7: FTE of roles directly supported by GRCF



Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=876 jobs).

The descriptions of jobs in the monitoring data were matched with job titles and groups from the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). Table 4.21 below sets out the main SOC groups of roles which have been supported.

The most common SOC group was that of Officer roles, accounting for a quarter of roles (166/786 roles or 25 per cent) and 20 per cent of the total FTE (117/580 FTE). This includes SOC titles such as Project Officer, Conservation Officer, Woodland Officer, Community Engagement Officer, and Education Officer, amongst others. Manager roles account for 19 per cent of roles (124/786 roles) and 14 per cent of FTE (81/580), including SOC titles such as Project Manager, Site Manager, Volunteer Manager, Human Resources Manager, and Finance Manager.

Ranger roles constitute 14 per cent of supported roles (93/876 roles), including Rangers, Nature Reserve Rangers, and Countryside Rangers. Roles within the Conservationist SOC group include all environmental professionals, including ecologists, horticulturalists, conservationists and researchers, accounting for 12 per cent of roles (80/876 roles). Furthermore, GRCF Round 2 has supported 38 youth and community workers (six per cent of total roles); however, there are likely to be more roles with a dedicated focus on young people and community outreach which fall within different SOC groups.

Table 4.21: Job roles and FTE directly supported, by SOC group

SOC group	Total roles	Percentage of roles	Total FTE	Percentage of FTE
Officer	166	25%	117	20%
Manager	124	19%	81	14%
Ranger	93	14%	73	13%
Conservationist/ Horticulturalist/ Scientist/ Researcher/ Technician	80	12%	50	9%
Assistant	65	10%	46	8%
Coordinator	40	6%	25	4%
Youth and community workers	38	6%	28	5%
Administrator	26	4%	14	2%
Landscaper/ Forester/Fencer/ Tree surgeon	15	2%	9	2%
Adviser	12	2%	6	1%
Director/Head/ Chief Executive	4	1%	1	0%
Others	34	5%	18	3%
Unknown	179	27%	111	19%
Total	876	N/A	580	N/A

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=876 jobs). These data relate to Table 3.33 in Round 1.

Where new roles have been created, equalities data were known for 60 per cent of roles (329/550 roles created). This suggests that 32 per cent (174/550 roles created) of new recruits have been aged 25 years or below and nine per cent (48/550 roles created) are noted to be socioeconomically disadvantaged (Table 4.22 below). Additionally, 18 are Black, Asian or from another ethnic minority (three per cent), 15 have a disability or long-term health condition (three per cent), and 17 are from the LGBTQ+ community (three per cent).

In Table 4.22 below, 'None of the above' represents individuals where it is known that they do not represent any of the equality groups below, 'Not known' represents people for whom these data are not known by the person uploading the monitoring information, and 'No data given' represents missing data where no information was given.

Table 4.22: Job roles created by GRCF, by equality group

Equality group	Number of roles created (including apprenticeships)	Percentage of roles created	Number of apprenticeship roles created
Aged 25 years or under	174	32%	138
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	48	9%	30
Black, Asian or from another ethnic minority	18	3%	10
LGBT+	17	3%	5
A disability	15	3%	10
Aged 60 years or over	2	0%	0
Other	1	0%	0
None of the above	125	23%	12
Not known	174	32%	29
No data given	47	9%	72
Total	550	N/A	183

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=550 jobs created). These data relate to Table 3.35 in Round 1. Please note that percentages total greater than 100 per cent, as individuals may represent multiple equality groups.

When compared with sector-wide averages, GRCF Round 2 equalities data indicate that projects have only been able to support increased diversity within the sector in a limited way. Across the environmental sector, 4.8 per cent of 'environmental professionals' identify as Black, Asian or from another minority ethnic community in comparison to 12.6 per cent of individuals across all other UK professions ([Racial diversity in environment professions](#), SOS-UK, 2022). Whilst GRCF Round 2 is looking to support diversity within the sector, only three per cent of individuals recruited to GRCF Round 2 identified as Black, Asian or from another ethnic minority, and the vast majority of said individuals were recruited to junior posts (apprenticeships). To ensure that future funding programmes are directly and positively contributing to sector-wide efforts to develop a more inclusive and more diverse workforce, additional guidance should be sought from across the sector and

disseminated to projects at the funding application stage. This will allow all eNGOs to explore new methods of recruitment and reflect on their own processes of equity, diversity and inclusion practices.

Apprenticeships

Monitoring data show that 252 apprenticeship roles were created across the GRCF programme, accounting for 201 FTE. In Round 2, 183 apprenticeship roles were created, accounting for 138 FTE (Table 4.23 below). Where projects have given further details on the nature of these apprenticeships, it appears that 67 roles are Kickstart positions and a further 24 are entry-level apprenticeships. Seven roles are listed as Level 2 roles (equivalent to GCSE level) and a further eight as Level 3 roles (equivalent to A Level).

Table 4.23: Apprenticeships and trainee roles supported, by level

Type	Total jobs – roles	Total jobs – FTE	Total projects employing	Programme total roles	Programme total FTE
Kickstart	67	45	19	73	49
Entry Level	25	14	9	32	21
Level 2	7	7	4	21	21
Level 3	8	7	4	13	12
Level 4	2	2	2	6	6
Other	2	2	2	35	30
Unknown	72	61	9	-	-
Total	183	138	49	252	201

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=183 apprenticeship roles). These data relate to Table 3.37 in Round 1.

The SOC groups of these apprenticeship roles demonstrate the range of opportunities offered as part of the GRCF. These include a considerable number of agricultural roles (such as rangers and nature reserve wardens), community/youth work roles (such as youth workers and outreach workers), as well as other technical roles (such as conservationists/environmentalists, marine advisers, laboratory assistants, and communications or admin assistants).

Jobs Indirectly Supported

It is estimated that in Round 2, £34.7m was spent on goods and services, which have supported an additional 553 full-time jobs. This demonstrates that GRCF Round 2 has actively supported employment within the environmental sector, driving investment in green jobs and skills across England in line with the 2021 [Green Jobs Taskforce Report](#) recommendations.

These figures have been calculated based on the following data and assumptions. As well as jobs supported directly within GRCF-funded organisations, partners and contractors outlined above, the expenditures of GRCF grants have also indirectly supported jobs within the supply chains of the relevant sectors. This section presents an analysis of the jobs that were indirectly supported by the GRCF based on the budgeted costs of goods and services purchased by projects.

The total cost associated with GRCF Round 2 activities is £48.97m, of which £14.3m was spent on directly supporting jobs within GRCF-funded organisations, partners and contractors outlined above. The remaining £34.7m was spent on other goods and services. The employment associated with this expenditure can be estimated using turnover and employment data from relevant sectors.

Cost data have been grouped based on areas of expenditure and been attributed a two-digit Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code relevant to these activities. Using data from the ONS Annual Business Survey (2021), a 'turnover per job' metric has been estimated using the number of people employed divided by the total turnover in these sectors in England. From this, it is possible to estimate the number of indirect jobs supported by the programme. It should be noted that there may be additional indirect employment effects at a local level due to continued indirect spending within local supply chains, which is dependent on the locations of suppliers and contractors used by projects.

4.3.2. Project Reflections

In final workshops, projects were positive about the impact that GRCF Round 2 has had on their own organisational capacity and resilience. Whilst it is unsurprising that GRCF monies increased capacity through the recruitment of new staff and the retainment of staff at risk of redundancy, projects also reported that GRCF Round 2 has enabled their organisation to diversify their service offer, secure funding via other funding streams, access new markets due to working on new sites, and approach project delivery in new ways.

In many cases, GRCF Round 2 project delivery has had a positive impact on eNGOs' reputations, as their successful delivery has produced an evidence base through which they can demonstrate their project successes and show that they lead on the delivery of large-scale projects. eNGOs commonly reported that prior to GRCF Round 2, they had only been partners on projects or led on smaller-scale projects. GRCF Round 2 provided the opportunity for eNGOs to lead bigger projects than they were used to, resulting in many feeling more confident that they have the expertise and skill to lead projects of this size in the future:

'There has been a real reputational change. This has helped us [to demonstrate] that we are not just partners but key stakeholders in this area of work and [we are capable of] leading on this whole project. Previously we might have had more of a side role.' (Final Workshop Project Response)

Evidence of project success, through collected data and demonstrated partnerships, has also resulted in some projects securing additional funds for future project delivery. Sustained activity and legacy will be explored in more detail in [Section 6](#).

As highlighted in [Section 3.5](#), projects reported that their GRCF Round 2 delivery has consolidated good working relationships with project partners. Good partnership working has also allowed eNGOs to explore new ways of working as well as new service or activity offers that they can provide. As a result, projects reported having developed improved approaches to delivery which they intend to use in the future:

‘On the back of the project, we’ve got a template for project delivery for the future and this sort of [...] approach will strengthen whatever we’re doing next and will set us up well. We now have stronger relationships with different partners, be that local landowners or [partner community organisations] that are looking to do more work. They’re very keen to work in partnership with us on the engagement side, especially in our environment. All across the board, it just gave us that sort of uplift, and the trustees are very keen to maintain the momentum [from the GRCF].’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

The opportunity that GRCF Round 2 provided to projects to work in new areas to support local nature was particularly praised by projects in final workshops. For example, one project fed back that the GRCF enabled them to undertake conservation activity to support a native species with which they had never worked previously. This opportunity was described as a ‘catalyst’ for that organisation, which has now been able to undertake more projects related to the conservation of this species, supporting the resilience of the organisation and the native species.

This aligns with the 2021 [Green Jobs Taskforce Report](#) recommendations to diversify the green recovery activity being undertaken across the sector. Future funding programmes could consider applying additional labour market insight to project activity proposals. This would encourage greater positive environmental activity in areas of rapid job creation potential that are at risk of unemployment.

8. Value for Money

8.1. Section Summary

- Overall, the programme offered good value for money, with high additionality of the funding, attracting considerable match funding and in-kind contributions, and a widespread impact of project activities.
- When asked to reflect on the extent to which their project would have been achievable without GRCF Round 2, the majority of surveyed eNGOs (71 per cent; 49/69) stated that delivery would not have been possible at all.
- Projects suggested that volunteer time was the most common in-kind contribution, with 78 per cent (58/74) of surveyed projects suggesting that volunteers contributed to their project activities.
- It is estimated that 28,839 days of volunteer time were completed during GRCF Round 2 across 58 projects.

This section provides an overview of the resource provided by the GRCF, project beneficiaries and partners, and other match funding. Moreover, this section draws on thematic workshops, the Wave 2 survey, and project-level evaluations to explore value added to projects by the GRCF. In addition, it includes details on the resource used in GRCF Round 2 and provides information on the following areas:

- The resource and cost-efficiency of project delivery. This section explores project costs by theme (in segmented project activity groups), wherein the cost per unit of outcome will be quantified.
- Gross value added and jobs retained. This assessment is based on Wave 2 survey responses.

8.2. Overview

This evaluation has assessed GRCF Round 2's value for money, considering the cost and efficiency of outcomes created and the perceived effectiveness of funding. This has been based on an analysis of project monitoring information, funding utilised, and the cost-effectiveness of activity. Assertions based on this analysis have been supplemented by qualitative feedback from projects regarding the effectiveness and value of the GRCF.

Overall, the programme offered good value for money, with high additionality of the funding, attracting considerable match funding and in-kind contributions, and a widespread impact of project activities. Projects were incredibly positive about the value for money delivered by the programme in final workshops. Whilst a comparable cost-effectiveness analysis was not carried out across the whole portfolio of projects or other programmes, where this has been feasible, the unit costs associated with resourcing the project outputs are aligned with what could be expected. A comparator analysis with other programmes was not feasible due to the

contextual factors that were necessary to consider for each project, as well as the different ways in which outcomes have been delivered. For example, whilst project activity may appear to be similar, what was delivered, how it was delivered and by whom it was delivered vary substantially from project to project. Without a similar level of detail regarding the delivery of other programmes, a comparison would be of limited merit.

In addition to the programme impact stemming directly from project activities, the programme has contributed to a range of both indirect and long-term impacts which will be realised after the end of the funding period. These also include indirect jobs supported through the supply chain as well as jobs which will be retained in funded organisations and the environmental sector following the end of the programme, thereby contributing to the resilience of the sector. This contributes to the strong value for money of the programme.

8.3. Resources Used by the Programme

5.2.1. Overview

The GRCF funded 159 projects across England to support nature recovery, conservation, and wider-sector resilience. **As of November 2023, £71m in payments had been made across the programme out of a total of £75.6m funding awarded.** Table 5.1 below illustrates that across Round 2, projects received a total of £37.8m directly from the GRCF and £11.1m of match funding, with projects costing a total of just over £45m.

Table 5.1: Project funding summary

Funding	Round 2 total (£)	Programme total (£)
Grant funding awarded	£37,830,800	£75,609,200
Payments made	£34,924,670	£71,024,670
% of grant paid	92%	96%
Match funding	£11,124,853	£17,624,853
Total project cost	£46,049,523	£88,649,523

Base: GRCF Round 2 grants database. Please note that match funding here includes all additional income utilised by projects. It has been assumed that there was no underspend on match funding.

Final payment data (from November 2023) suggest that 92 per cent of the total grant funding allocated has been paid to projects, totalling a payment of £34,924,670. Almost three fifths of projects have spent all of the grant funds allocated to them (58 per cent; 52/90), with the remaining 46 projects reporting an underspend. Five projects reported spending less than 80 per cent of the total grant allocated to them,

and 33 projects reported an underspend of less than 20 per cent of the allocated grant funding.

As illustrated by Table 5.2 below, two thirds of successful bids were for medium-sized projects (£50,000 to £250,000), a similar proportion to that of Round 1 (47/69; 68 per cent). This suggests that there is a continued need for this level of funding.

Table 5.2: Project grant size awarded and total grant

Size of grant	Total projects	% of projects	Total (£)
£50k–£250k	63	70%	£12,331,600
£250k–£2m	27	30%	£25,499,200

Base: GRCF Round 2 grants database.

5.2.2. Match Funding

Overall, 77 per cent of project costs was covered by GRCF funding. As illustrated by Table 5.4 below, over two fifths of projects in receipt of a GRCF grant of over £250k had a match-funding contribution of more than 20 per cent (44 per cent; 12/27 projects). Round 2 projects in receipt of a grant of over £250k were required to have a match-funding contribution of at least five per cent. Monitoring information indicates that most projects secured a considerably higher level of match funding than the five per cent minimum requirement, suggesting that this requirement for GRCF Round 2 was appropriate.

This confirms that securing a higher level of match funding was achievable for most large projects. In comparison, around one fifth of projects with smaller grants (from £50k–£250k) have either no match funding (19 per cent; 12/63 projects) or a match-funding contribution greater than 30 per cent (21 per cent; 13/63 projects). Levels of match funding vary considerably for smaller projects, with no clear trends based on the size of the grant received by projects.

Table 5.8: Proportion of match funding per project, by size of GRCF grant

Proportion of match funding	Total projects with £50k–£250k grants (n=63)	Total projects with £250k–£2m grants (n=27)	% of projects with £50k–£250k grants	% of projects with £250k–£2m grants
<1	12	0	19%	0%
1–4%	4	0	6%	0%
5–9%	10	4	16%	15%
10–15%	11	5	17%	19%
16–20%	7	6	11%	22%
21–30%	6	7	10%	26%
31–40%	7	3	11%	11%
41–50%	5	1	8%	4%
51% or higher	1	1	2%	4%

Base: GRCF Round 2 grants database (n=90 projects).

Projects with GRCF grants of over £250k provided additional details on their match-funding sources. As illustrated by Table 5.4 below, these projects most commonly received match funding from local authorities (52 per cent; 14), through their own reserves (52 per cent; 14) or through a private donation from trusts, charities or foundations (52 per cent; 14). Moreover, Table 5.4 shows that central government and other public sector funding provided the highest amount of additional match funding for GRCF Round 2 projects (£1.5m and £1.3m, respectively).

Table 5.9: Match-funding sources for projects over £250,000

Match-funding source	Number of projects	% of projects	Total match funding (£)
Local authority	14	52%	£130,250
Own reserves	14	52%	£453,233
Private donation – trusts/charities/foundations	14	52%	£68,000
Central government	12	44%	£1,531,079
Other public sector	10	37%	£1,260,300
Other fundraising	9	33%	£191,443

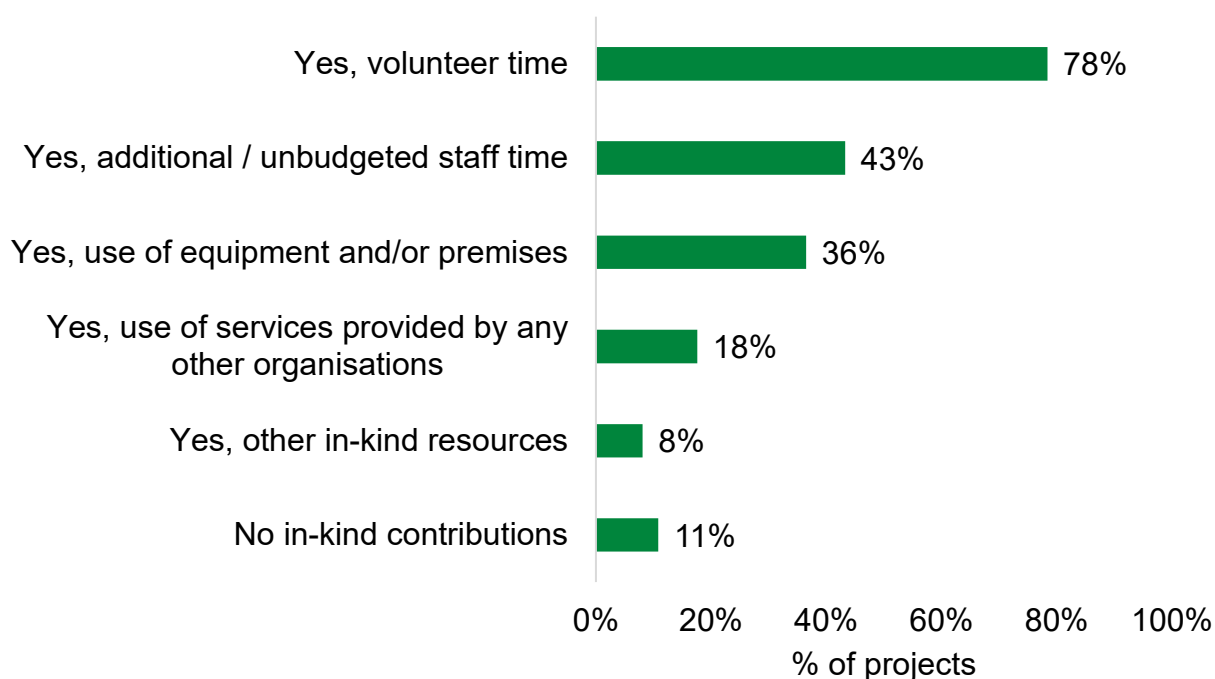
Base: GRCF Round 2 confirmed cost and income monitoring information. Number of projects receiving GRCF funds from £250k–£2m (n=27).

5.2.3. In-Kind Contributions

In addition to the GRCF Round 2 grant and match funding, a range of in-kind contributions were included as resources used by projects. Projects suggested that volunteer time was the most common in-kind contribution, with 78 per cent (58/74) of surveyed projects suggesting that volunteers contributed to their project activities. Data provided by projects estimated **that a total of 28,839 days of volunteer time were completed during GRCF Round 2** across the 58 projects that gave details on volunteer contributions.

Projects reported volunteer numbers totalling 22,050 across their project activity. However, it is important to highlight that total volunteer numbers likely refer to instances of volunteering and cannot be reported as 22,050 unique volunteers, as it is likely that some volunteers took part in multiple volunteering activities. Of the 22,050 instances of volunteering, projects reported that 12,049 new volunteers were recruited. Projects anticipated that 45 per cent of these new volunteers would be available for future projects, a total of 5,466 volunteers. A considerable number of projects stated that additional, unbudgeted staff time was contributed to projects (43 per cent; 32/74), and over one third benefitted from the use of equipment and/or premises not included in project budgets (36 per cent; 27/74). **Projects estimated that a total of 22,239 hours of additional, unbudgeted staff time were provided to the projects.**

Figure 5.1: In-kind contributions used by GRCF projects



Base: GRCF Round 2 Wave 2 survey (n=74).

Over one third of projects agreed that the use of premises and equipment contributed to their project (36 per cent; 27/74), suggesting that this included some organisational core costs including premises and utility bills, the use of vehicles, and the use of equipment already owned by organisations. Other in-kind resource contributions noted included timber and stone from local sources, seeds and plants donated, and the cost of images for use in projects. One project noted the in-kind contributions of activities at museums, nature reserves, and open green spaces in delivering events.

It is important to highlight that in additional value brought to the GRCF through match funding and in-kind contributions. The evaluation is not aware of any fraudulent activity having taken place. It is acknowledged that considered approaches taken with regard to project eligibility will have deterred this type of activity.

8.4. Additionality of Funding

It is important to consider the additionality of GRCF Round 2 when assessing whether it represents good value for money. Additionality is the concept of determining whether the funding has generated outcomes or benefits that are additional to what would have occurred in the absence of that investment. It is not possible to consider counterfactual scenarios in which the programme did not exist; however, additionality can be understood based on project perceptions of project activity or expected outcomes had they not received funding.

Overall, the programme offers high additionality for both the delivery of project activities and the achievement of outcomes.

5.3.1. Project Delivery

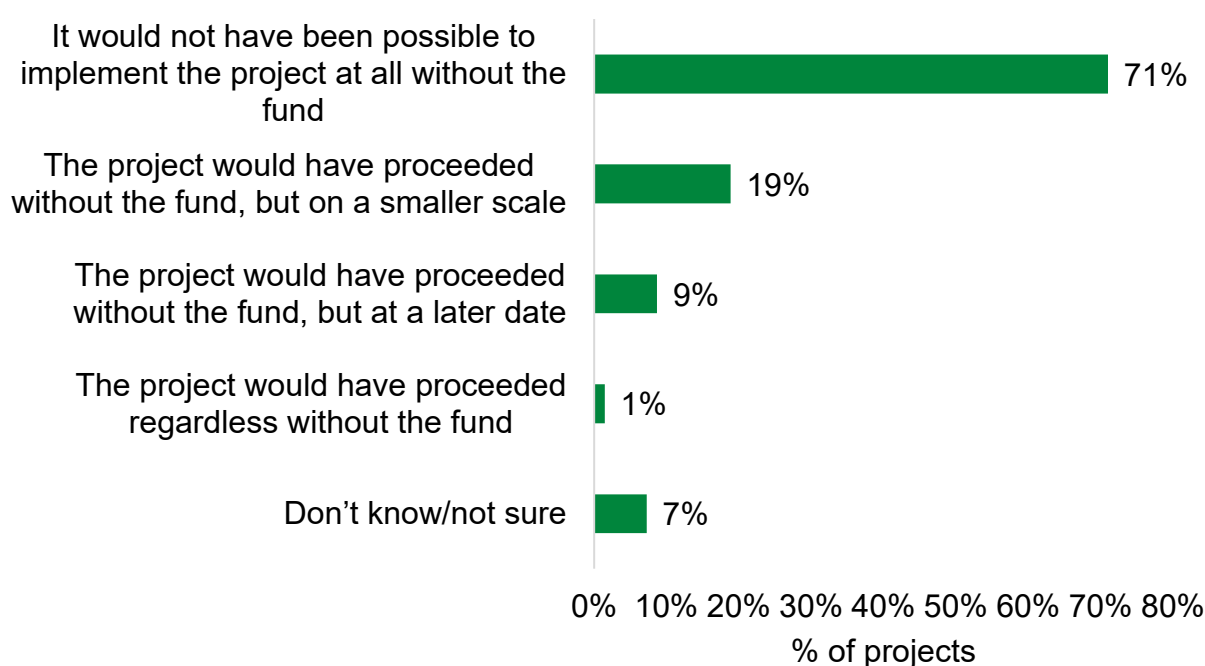
When asked to reflect on the extent to which their project would have been achievable without GRCF Round 2, the majority of surveyed eNGOs (71 per cent; 49/69) stated that delivery would not have been possible at all (Figure 5.2 below). Around one fifth suggested that the project would have proceeded but on a smaller scale (19 per cent or 13/69 projects), and nine per cent that it would have proceeded but at a later date (6/69 projects). Only one project was confident that the project would have proceeded regardless, with five projects unsure:

Final Workshop Project Responses:

‘[Our] income had been severely reduced during the [COVID-19] pandemic, and budgets would not have been made available for this type of work/engagement.’

‘This funding allowed us to build momentum and, once secured, leverage other [internal and external] funding to progress the work and achieve the outcomes.’

Figure 5.2: Feasibility of project delivery without GRCF funding

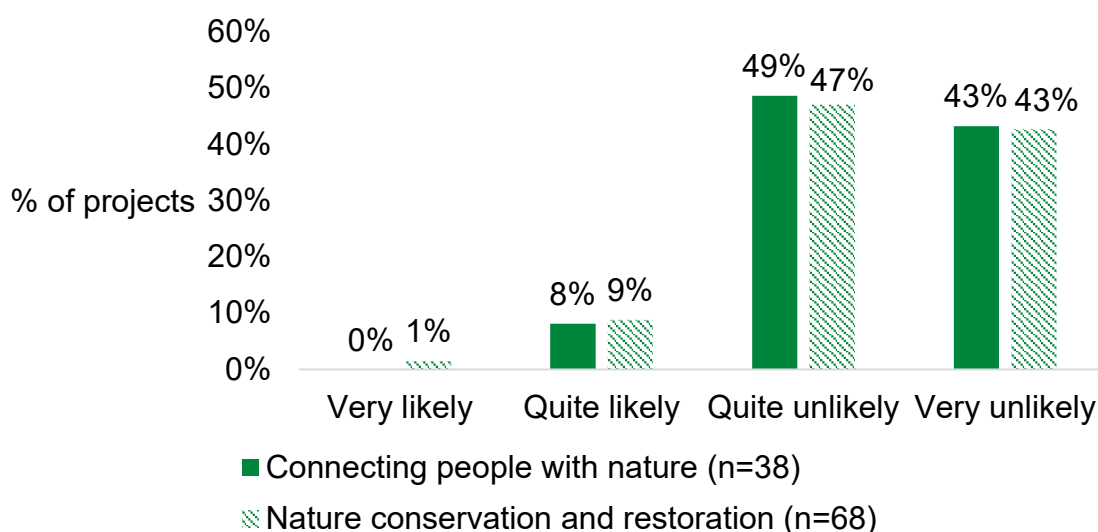


Base: GRCF Round 2 survey (n=69).

8.5. Achievement of Outcomes

Figure 5.3 below illustrates that projects reported overwhelmingly that it was unlikely that they would have secured the relevant outcomes for their projects without the GRCF funding. This clearly demonstrates the added value and the perceived necessity of GRCF Round 2. The subsections below explore additional project feedback based on GRCF-themed project activity.

Figure 5.3: Likelihood of projects achieving outcomes without GRCF funding



Base: GRCF Round 2 survey.

5.4.1. Nature Conservation and Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

The majority of projects (90 per cent; 61/68) stated it was either quite or very unlikely that they would have secured outcomes for nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions without GRCF Round 2 funding.

Projects attributed their answers to a range of factors including the ability to fund capital and large-scale habitat works. Projects gave examples of investing in a new plant nursery, a hatchery for birds, resource for surveying and monitoring work, and other landscape-scale habitat works which would not have happened without such a large amount of funding:

Final Workshop Project Responses:

‘These large-scale improvements cannot be done without the support of funds such as this. It allowed a river catchment approach to be taken, rather than a piecemeal, ensuring impacts could be seen across the entire ecosystem.’

‘The GRCF gave us the resources to deliver a more holistic project that incorporated both the capital deliver, long-term monitoring and engaging the community.’

Outcomes relating to nature were also enabled by dedicated staff resource, which created capacity in organisations to oversee the projects. This included time to work with landowners and stakeholders, as well as to employ and coordinate contractors, and dedicated staff members to coordinate volunteers and arrangements for work to be carried out:

‘The GRCF allowed us to both afford to pay all the contractors to do the habitat work and also employ a Project Officer to make all the arrangements for the work to be carried out, particularly as much of the hedge planting was done by volunteers.’ (Wave 2 Survey Response)

Overall, the size of the funding and the range of activities that were eligible for funding enabled projects to take a long-term, strategic and holistic approach to nature creation and restoration activity.

5.4.2. Connecting People with Nature

The vast majority of projects (92 per cent; 34/37) stated that it was either quite or very unlikely that they would have secured outcomes to connect people with nature without GRCF Round 2 funding. Similarly to projects that secured outcomes related to nature conservation, this was attributed to dedicated staff time to deliver activities and build relationships with project partners and communities. The additional capacity that this created enabled projects to be innovative in their approach to outreach activities, developing new relationships and extending their reach in a way that may not have otherwise occurred:

‘The fact the GRCF supported new and existing staff enabled us to be more innovative in our approach to reaching our community. There was flexibility to try and engage our community in a different way.’ (Wave 2 Survey Response)

5.4.3. Future or Ongoing Outcomes

It is important to note that the value-for-money assessment for projects should consider a balance between short-term and long-term outcomes, as well as the indirect outcomes of the projects which will be realised after the end of the funding period. These also include jobs supported by the programme which will be retained in funded organisations and the environmental sector following the end of the programme. The delivery of indirect outcomes over time can also contribute to a sustained, long-term impact and improve the value for money of the programme. Projects have suggested a range of activities and outcomes which they anticipate will be achieved in the future due to GRCF-funded activity, which are outlined in [Section 6.1](#).

8.6. Cost-Effectiveness

This section considers the cost-effectiveness of Round 2 projects. Cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) is a method used to compare the relative costs and outcomes of different interventions. It is a systematic approach that considers the costs of

delivering activities alongside the benefits that they produce in order to determine whether they represent good value for money. Furthermore, it is useful for future projects or programmes to give an understanding of the costs associated with particular activities or outcomes.

In line with HM Treasury's [Green Book](#) and [Magenta Book](#) guidance, it is understood that CEA is most appropriate and rigorous where costs can be associated with a singular main output or outcome. When approaching a programme such as the GRCF, additional consideration must be given to the range of objectives and outcomes and the different metrics used to quantify these outcomes. As such, this analysis does not seek to compare all activities delivered by the Round 2 portfolio of projects, but rather includes two types of cost-effectiveness analysis:

- Comparing the unit costs of groups of projects which have delivered similar activities.
- Associating cost with delivering individual outcomes where these have been widely delivered across the portfolio of projects, such as jobs supported and trees planted.

Projects have been grouped based on a range of data including monitoring information (MI) provided by projects, survey data detailing the proportion of project cost allocated to each theme, and qualitative information provided by projects through surveys with regard to the focus of project activities.

The final project costs used for the CEA combine data from projects' application data, data on final project spend, and survey data relating to the proportions of costs spent on each activity.

The terminology used is set out below:

- Total **grant** refers to the amount of funding awarded to projects by the Heritage Fund.
- Proportion **spend** refers to the percentage of the total grant spent by projects at the end of the project.
- Total **spend** refers to the amount of funding spent by projects out of the total grant.
- Total **cost** refers to the total amount of funding put towards each project (including the total grant and any match funding).
- Actual **cost** is calculated using the total cost multiplied by the proportion spend. Data on the final cost spent are not available. As such, for the purposes of the CEA, it has been assumed that any underspend on the total grant (where the proportion spend is lower than 100 per cent) can also be applied to the total costs.

The final cost data used for the CEA are the actual cost multiplied by the proportion of costs spent on the relevant activity, as provided by projects through the survey and project application data. Where survey data are used, a CEA is only possible for those projects that have responded to the survey (n=75).

These segments have been analysed in line with the methodology for Round 1 projects, where possible, to allow for comparison across Round 1 and Round 2 funded projects and in consideration of the portfolio of projects funded across the GRCF. However, due to the differences in the portfolio of funded projects and the shifts in the economic climate between Round 1 and Round 2, any interpretation from comparisons between the two rounds should be undertaken with caution.

The key outputs used to calculate unit costs are:

- the area benefitting from activity in hectares (direct and total)
- the number of trees planted
- the number of people engaging with project activities
- the number of events held
- the total FTE of jobs supported.

There are a number of limitations to consider when interpreting the following analysis:

- Firstly, when interpreting the data, additional consideration should be given to contextual factors of each project and the ways in which outcomes have been delivered. For example, the costs associated with tree planting will differ considerably depending on who is planting the tree. Some projects have held community planting days with members of the public, some may have relied on existing volunteers to plant trees, and some will have employed contractors, all with different associated costs. Understandings of what 'value for money' constitutes for each of these examples will vary, whether this be financial efficiency, social value, or otherwise.
- Secondly, costs have been associated based on figures reported by projects, which may be subject to different interpretations by those responding to the survey. For example, what one project calls 'tree planting' may be considered as 'conservation' by another. This presents a challenge when scaling these proportions to project costs, which may result in figures which are not true to value.
- Finally, the cost-effectiveness analysis below must be understood in the context of the types of value within habitat restoration. For example, the area having benefitted from many types of conservation activities may be relatively small, such as pond creation or the removal of non-native invasives, but represent an important contribution to biodiversity and nature restoration.

5.5.1. Projects Focused on Habitat Conservation

Overall, 22 projects have been included in the CEA that are related to habitat conservation, which compares outcomes on areas improved (in hectares) with cost data relating to both habitat creation and restoration activities. These projects may also have delivered outcomes related to connecting people with nature; however, the proportion of costs spent on conservation, restoration, or nature-based solutions for all projects is higher than 60 per cent.

These projects have been further grouped based on the habitat type and activities in Table 5.5 below. They include both habitat creation and restoration activities.

Table 5.5: Cost-effectiveness analysis of habitat conservation projects

Segment	Number of projects	Area of direct benefit (hectares)	Total area benefitting (direct and indirect benefits, hectares)	Total project cost	Total conservation cost	Area of direct benefit – unit cost per hectare (conservation costs)	Total area of direct benefit – unit cost per total hectare (conservation costs)
Meadow and grassland (connective)	6	1,839	55,929	£3,297,091	£1,366,741	£743	£24
Woodland	2	705	1,866	£610,994	£513,745	£729	£275
Wetland and ponds	4	29,738	36,182	£3,779,003	£2,288,866	£77	£63
Riparian	6	1,722	6,806	£1,434,910	£1,041,782	£605	£153
Mixed lowland	4	571	4,171	£1,760,783	£1,227,864	£2,149	£294
Total	22	34,576	104,953	£10,882,782	£6,438,998	N/A	N/A

Base: GRCF costs data, GRCF Round 2 monitoring information. Please note that total project costs have been rounded to the nearest pound and areas have been rounded to the nearest hectare.

Meadow and Grassland (Connective)

Six projects focused their activities on ‘connective’ habitats, predominantly meadows and grassland. These projects have delivered habitat creation or restoration activity on a number of sites, emphasising the importance of creating corridors or networks of habitats to connect fragmented ecosystems supporting wildlife movement as well as adaptation to climate change. These projects have engaged a range of landowners and partners to create connective habitats to support biodiversity and resilience for species.

The unit costs for these projects were estimated to be £743 per hectare for land benefitting directly from creation and restoration activities, and £24 per hectare for land both directly and indirectly benefitting. Since connective habitats are designed to be a network of smaller sites, they can be characterised by having a lower area of direct benefit (in which activity was held), but a higher total benefit across the whole nature recovery corridor.

Woodland

Two projects have a core focus on woodland management. These projects had similar project costs; due to the difference in the area having benefitted, however, the unit costs for both projects show considerable variation.

One project had a specific focus on managing ash dieback, which included removing diseased ash trees as well as tree planting to restore felled areas over 20 sites with 14ha of direct benefit, with a unit cost of £20,409 per hectare of direct benefit. The other project included management of an ancient woodland, with a combination of tree planting, thinning, felling, and removing invasive species over six sites with 690ha of direct benefit, with a unit cost of £325 per hectare of direct benefit.

Wetland and Ponds

Four projects have a core focus on wetlands and other freshwater sites including fens, ponds and floodplains, including activity in the form of habitat creation, restoration, and nature-based solutions. These projects aim to enhance, expand or restore these ecosystems to benefit biodiversity, including the recovery of threatened species. These projects recognise the importance of wetlands in providing nature-based solutions to environmental challenges, such as flood regulation, carbon sequestration, and climate resilience.

Each project includes a community engagement component, aiming to connect people with wetland environments. This engagement takes various forms including citizen science, volunteering opportunities, and educational programmes; however, conservation activity accounts for at least 60 per cent of total costs.

Due to the nature-based solution activity relating to flood regulation and carbon sequestration, these projects have provided considerable data relating to indirect impacts, which are included in totals below.

These projects have an average unit cost of £63 per total hectare. This low unit cost is driven by one particular project, which delivered landscape-scale restoration, therefore carrying out conservation activity over a large area (27,557ha). The unit cost of this project (direct and indirect) is £42 per hectare, with the unit cost of the other three comparable projects being between £120 and £151 per hectare.

Riparian

Six projects have a core focus on habitat conservation activities in riparian habitats, often through the restoration of natural processes and ecological features with the aim of improving biodiversity, improving water quality, and reducing flood risk. These projects have delivered a range of conservation activities including enhancing

riverbank vegetation, reprofiling river channels, and installing leaky dams and natural logjams.

It is challenging to conduct a comparable CEA for all six projects, as projects have reported outcomes using different metrics — some calculating using the area (hectares) and some using linear features (km). Where outcome benefits were provided in hectares, however, there was an average unit cost of £153 per hectare, including both direct and indirect benefits.

Mixed Lowland

Four projects have carried out habitat conservation activities on a range of lowland habitats including woodland, wetland, meadows, arable land, and semi-urban parks. These projects have a unit cost per total hectare having benefitted of £294; however, the projects themselves have unit costs of between £226 and £1,452 per total hectare having benefitted.

This is broadly comparable to the unit costs of activities delivered in Round 1 based on mixed lowland habitat types. In Round 1, five projects were considered to be in this habitat type, spending £2.66m on conservation, restoring 7,825ha of habitat, with a unit cost of £340 per hectare.

Species Conservation

Four projects have had a specific focus on conservation for a specific species. These projects have delivered activities on a range of habitats, often at a landscape scale. These include building a hatchery to support white-clawed crayfish, surveying and stakeholder engagement work for merlins (a type of falcon which lives in moorland habitats), habitat creation to support terns (a bird which lives on coastal plains), and introducing beavers into a wetland reserve. Due to the nature of these projects, either working on a landscape scale or carrying out activity which does not relate to habitat conservation, these projects have not reported large areas of land against which to calculate unit costs.

5.5.2. Projects Focused on Tree Planting

Whilst a number of projects planted trees as part of their habitat conservation activities, only one project had tree planting as their core focus. This project proposed a programme of community tree planting and tree-related activities to increase canopy cover and improve urban forest management in seven coastal towns and cities with high deprivation.

This project associated 50 per cent of their total project costs with tree planting, equating to £896,250. They planted 69,842 trees in total, leading to a cost per unit of £13 per tree.

A further 46 projects associated specific costs with their tree-planting activity, which allows us to calculate unit costs for tree planting across these projects. It should be noted that this includes a wide range of tree types including saplings, whips, and plug plants. Moreover, there was considerable variation as to the nature of the tree-planting activity, carried out by a combination of volunteers, contractors, school groups, or other members of the public at engagement events. **Overall, these**

projects attributed £3,040,252 to planting 549,583 trees, equating to £5.53 per tree.

This unit cost is comparable to that of the 26 Round 1 projects for which the specific cost of tree-planting activity was available. This suggests that these 26 Round 1 projects were expected to spend a total of £5.2m on tree-planting activities and had planted more than 1 million trees at a unit cost of £4.99 per tree. It should be noted that the portfolio of Round 1 projects had a greater emphasis on tree-planting activity than Round 2.

5.5.3. Projects Focused on Young People

Five projects had a core focus on engagement which targeted young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. These projects prioritised community involvement as well as collaboration with young people engaged from a range of settings with a focus on educational and skill development opportunities. Furthermore, these projects sought to develop approaches to nature recovery that are more equal, more diverse and more inclusive by engaging with young people who may face barriers to engaging with nature.

While their primary focus was on engaging young people, these projects have also involved elements of environmental restoration carried out through engagement activities. Whilst these projects all focus on young people, it is likely that the monitoring information relating to events and engagement may include people of all ages due to the nature of how projects engage with young people and volunteers.

These projects have held a total of 1,558 events, engaging 19,049 people, with total engagement costs of £661,648. As such, these projects have a cost per event of £425 and a cost per person engaged of £35.

Comparing this to projects funded through GRCF Round 1 is challenging, as Round 1 reported on in-person events in general and did not report specifically on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. By way of comparison, however, the 20 projects that had focused exclusively on in-person activities in Round 1 delivered more than 2,500 events and engaged more than 24,000 people. The estimated cost of these activities was £2.5m, equating to unit costs of almost £1,000 per event and just over £100 per person engaged. This is considerably more expensive per output in comparison with events which targeted young people in GRCF Round 2; however, these events are not directly comparable.

Cost-Effectiveness of Employment Outcomes

Jobs supported by the programme is a common metric across all projects, which can be segmented within cost data. This commonality allows a CEA to be conducted across all projects for which cost data are available. Jobs supported includes a range of job types including jobs created, existing jobs retained, and apprenticeships. However, a cautious approach should be taken when comparing this with programmes with a core focus on supporting employment, as employment and resilience sit alongside a range of other outcomes for the GRCF and may not be directly comparable.

The analysis shows that £14.6m was spent on staff costs, which supported 579 FTE jobs. Therefore, the total cost per FTE job was £25,230.

Table 5.6: Cost-effectiveness of employment outcomes

Size of grant	Projects included	Total staff costs	Total FTE	Cost per FTE
Medium	60	£5,668,359	236	£24,023
Large	27	£8,937,678	343	£26,060
Total	87	£14,606,037	579	£25,230

Base: GRCF monitoring information and cost data (n=87 projects and 579 FTE).

8.7. Perceived Value for Money

Overall, projects were incredibly positive about the value for money delivered by the programme in final workshops. Across workshops, projects highlighted the range of intangible and immeasurable benefits of the project which contributed to the value for money of GRCF Round 2. These included the relationships built between project partners, landowners, contractors, community groups, and the public, the positive experiences of those engaged in project activities, and the ongoing benefit to the environment in relation to biodiversity and climate change:

‘Additional things that you can’t quantify like the better connections and the better partnerships and the more personal experiences.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

Projects gave examples of efficiency in project spend, either through delivering more activity than originally planned or through delivering activity using cheaper or unbudgeted resource such as apprentices or volunteer time:

‘I would say everyone works so hard and if that was in any other sector, it would cost way more.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

Projects were positive about the sizes of the grants and the nature of what could be funded, suggesting that these enabled projects to be more strategic about their delivery and, therefore, deliver greater value for money. For example, one project noted that having a range of activities funded through the same grant supports internal communication for project delivery teams and improves capacity that can be focused on project activities.

Value for money was also supported through the funding of existing jobs, alongside the creation of new jobs. During final workshops, one project noted that the GRCF has directly prevented two redundancies within their organisation, which supports the wider organisational resilience as well as the retention of skills and knowledge. Projects noted a range of indirect impacts for those trained and upskilled through the

project, including staff, apprentices and volunteers, which it was suggested have a multiplier effect on the sector.

Projects were positive about value for money related to the processes associated with the programme, which were felt to be proportionate to the level of funding and the number of outcomes delivered. One project said:

‘In my experience, it’s been the least bureaucratic [source of funding] and allowed for the most innovation.’ (Final Workshop Project Response)

9. Sustainability

9.1. Section Summary

- Almost half of all surveyed GRCF Round 2 projects confirmed that they have secured additional funding to continue their project activities (47 per cent; 35/75). In total, projects have received an additional £6.7m in funding post-GRCF.
- Risks that may affect continued project activity commonly included a lack of sustained funding (57 per cent; 43/75) and retaining key staff (16 per cent; 12/75).
- Projects commonly reported that they would be able to continue activity due to the strengthened relationships between the project leads, partners, and local stakeholders. These have helped to build resilience into organisations to continue to deliver in the future.
- The scale of GRCF funding has enabled projects to invest time in piloting new approaches to engagement with community groups, contributing to eNGOs' understanding of 'what works' when engaging with local community groups.

This section explores which aspects of GRCF Round 2 project activities will be sustained post-funding as well as project perceptions of project legacy. This section draws on the Wave 2 survey findings alongside final thematic workshop feedback and project-level reports.

9.2. Sustained Project Delivery

Almost half of all surveyed GRCF Round 2 projects confirmed that they have secured additional funding to continue their project activities (47 per cent; 35/75), whilst the majority of other projects are still hoping to secure funding to maintain project delivery in the future. This is a positive finding because it confirms that some aspects of GRCF project activity will continue beyond the lifetime of the funding. In total, projects have received an additional £6.7m in funding post-GRCF. Additional funding has come from a range of sources including GRCF partners, such as Defra, the Heritage Fund, Natural England, the Forestry Commission, and the Environment Agency, alongside corporate sponsorships, local authorities, local water companies, and smaller environmental charities and trusts within projects' local area. This demonstrates that eNGO engagement in the GRCF has effectively supported additional investment in the sector in the longer term.

Unsurprisingly, when projects were asked to reflect within workshops and the survey if any risks may impact the sustainability of their project delivery, projects most commonly stated a lack of continued funding (57 per cent; 43/75). In many cases, projects highlighted that the GRCF Round 2 combination of revenue and capital funding was not the 'norm' and was perceived to be generous, with a degree of

flexibility for which other funding did not cater. As previously reported, projects were particularly complimentary about the flexibility afforded to them through the range of activity that they could undertake within the GRCF and by the Heritage Fund, which allowed projects to amend activity and recruitment where justified. Projects reported:

Final Workshop Project Responses:

‘Most successful projects require generous revenue funding to ensure sufficient skilled staff are available to deliver milestones and [this project] was perfect in that respect.’

‘As a grant-funded organisation, this project was brilliant at addressing the post-COVID-19 lack of finance, and supported the retention and creation of new jobs within our organisation. It also greatly supported skills building and the development of volunteer working parties and habitat restoration and creation (that had also been halted due to COVID-19 pressures).’

Within the Wave 2 survey, five projects also highlighted that if they were to receive short-term funding, this would limit their ability to continue engaging with target communities. Projects reflected that effective targeted work with communities takes considerable resource and time, meaning that if they were to undertake more light-touch outreach work, there would be concerns that at best they would not effectively engage with communities and at worst they would negatively impact relationships that they have built with specific communities over the course of GRCF project delivery.

Projects also highlighted that retaining staff will be a challenge which could affect the sustainability of project delivery (16 per cent; 12/75). Where this was a concern, projects felt that continued project delivery would only be viable whilst trained staff remain in post. This suggests that continued project delivery may be viewed as a short-term goal. Losing trained staff was a key concern, as projects felt that their organisations could not afford to recruit and train new staff. However, whilst the loss of staff would understandably impact eNGOs’ ability to deliver, it is important to highlight that through GRCF project delivery, projects should have been disseminating knowledge and training across the organisation.

6.1.1. Nature Conservation and Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions Activity

Investment in capital works will continue to provide benefits to organisations beyond the end of the projects. Additionally, projects that have delivered habitat creation or restoration activity have established or updated site management plans as a result of the project, which will enable future conservation activity on GRCF-funded sites. Overall, 51 per cent of projects (35/69) stated that all sites had a management plan in place, with a further 45 per cent (31/69 projects) noting that some sites had management plans in place:

‘All created, restored and improved habitats will be maintained and managed for biodiversity; as such, over time their benefit for wildlife will increase.’ (Wave 2 Survey Response)

A consistent benefit across projects was that of strengthened relationships between the project leads, partners, and local stakeholders, including improvements relating to reputation. These have helped to build resilience in organisations to continue to deliver in the future. For outcomes relating to nature conservation, a number of projects noted that partner organisations will maintain the work that they have carried out through their site management activities:

‘We feel that the project has helped our reputation with our partners and we believe that this will make it more likely that we will collaborate again with them in the future.’ (Wave 2 Survey Response)

Some projects commented on the multiplier effect of impacts on land management and biodiversity from building relationships with landowners, farmers and contractors. For example, through working directly with farmers on various aspects of capital delivery and through offering workshops, training, and networking opportunities, one project suggested that this has demonstrated how outcomes for nature may be improved on farms and how these may be incorporated into viable farm business plans. This has led to the development of a pipeline of projects on farmland in the area, which has the potential to contribute significantly to the step change in farming approaches to biodiversity.

A similar effect was noted by projects in relation to working with contractors, suggesting that through positive engagement with local contractors delivering capital works, there has been an indirect effect of changing their practices to grass cutting, land management, and considerations of biodiversity.

Additional outcomes of project activities include the amount of evidence which has been generated. A number of projects noted that through the funding they were able to establish baseline sampling or surveying, or that evidence generated by surveying, monitoring, and citizen science activity will support future funding bids.

6.1.2. Connecting People with Nature Activity

Most surveyed projects (89 per cent; 64/72) reported that it is likely that they will continue to deliver at least some aspects of their activities regarding connecting people with nature post-GRCF. Projects suggested a range of ways in which outcomes relating to connecting people with nature will continue to be realised beyond the end of project delivery. For example, a number of resources have been created which will support future projects, including platforms for citizen science and educational materials.

As in [Sections 4.2](#) and [5.2](#), the scale of funding has enabled projects to invest time in piloting new approaches to engagement with community groups, contributing to organisations’ understanding of ‘what works’ when engaging with their local community groups, which can be incorporated into future projects. One project was

positive about the evidence generated through the project, which has helped them to secure legacy funding:

‘The Environment Group are keen to continue [raising] the profile of the river with the community and now know how to do it.’ (Wave 2 Survey Response)

‘We have secured some legacy funding for two of our Engagement Ranger posts, but this would have been much harder to do/unlikely without the demonstrable success of our GRCF year.’ (Wave 2 Survey Response)

Investing in community engagement and capacity building can empower local groups to continue delivering activities, reducing the need for continuous external intervention. Projects which have established regular volunteer groups and supported them with training and equipment will carry on delivering engagement activities.

6.1.3. Resilience and Employment

In addition to supporting the creation and retention of jobs in the sector during the funding period, the number of jobs retained in the environmental sector is a contribution to the long-term resilience of the sector. Through the final survey, projects indicated the destinations of roles supported by the programme, with data provided on the destinations of 573 jobs out of the total of 876 supported through the programme.

In total, surveyed organisations suggested that 78 per cent of jobs that were newly created for their project have been retained in the environmental sector, either continuing within funded organisations or moving to another environmental role. This includes apprenticeships, and accounts for 288 job roles out of 370 newly created roles for which destination data were given. Scaling this proportion to the 550 roles which were created through the programme in the monitoring information, it is estimated that Round 2 of the GRCF has created 428 jobs which have been retained in the environmental sector.

The survey suggests that three in five roles (60 per cent or 345/573 roles) supported by the programme have been retained within the same organisation following the end of the projects. This increases to 91 per cent (184/203 roles) for roles that were initially supported as retained jobs during the projects, and 58 per cent (122/209 roles) for jobs that were created by projects (excluding apprenticeships).

A further 25 per cent of roles (141/573 roles) have been retained in the environmental sector, but not in the same organisation in which their job was supported by the GRCF. This figure decreases to seven per cent of jobs retained (14/203 roles) but is as high as 30 per cent for jobs created by the programme (63/209 roles). This suggests that those who were in organisations before the programme are most likely to continue to be retained in that organisation following

the programme, but that new jobs created by the programme are more likely to be retained in the sector.

Table 6.4: Destination of jobs supported by the programme, by type of role

Destination of jobs	Jobs created (n=209)	Jobs retained (n=203)	Apprenticeships (n=161)
Continued in their role within your organisation	58%	91%	24%
Secured another role within a different organisation in the environmental sector	30%	7%	40%
Secured another role within a different organisation in a different sector	2%	0%	6%
Other destination	3%	0%	7%
Destination unknown	6%	1%	23%

Base: Wave 2 survey (n=573 jobs). Please note that this only includes data where destination data were given by projects.

Amongst the 161 apprenticeships for whom destination data were provided:

- Twenty-four per cent (39 roles) have been retained within funded organisations,
- Forty per cent (64 roles) have secured another role in the environmental sector,
- Six per cent (10 roles) have secured another role in a different sector,
- Seven per cent (11 roles) have gone on to another destination, and
- Twenty-three per cent (37 roles) of the destinations of apprenticeships were unknown.

This reflects that many apprenticeship roles were designed as ‘stepping stones’, equipping apprentices with skills and experience for not only funded organisations but also the wider environmental sector.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

Within GRCF Round 2, 90 projects worked across 1,839 sites. In total, the projects directly benefitted 122,318ha and 587km of land across England, planted 616,811 trees, engaged 244,340 people in environmental activities, and directly supported 876 jobs.

The reach of project outcomes and their positive impact on local nature, alongside many other key positive impacts, show the positive progress made within GRCF Round 2 and across the wider programme.

This section of the report outlines key findings from GRCF Round 2, across the three evaluation reports, alongside key learning and recommendations. Please note that recommendations made are intended to be considered for future funding opportunities that have similar aims to those of the GRCF.

10.1. Process

Projects were largely positive about the GRCF application process and how they were supported through it. The majority of surveyed GRCF Round 2 projects found that the GRCF application process was clear and straightforward and that the bid-awarding process was transparent. Moreover, projects were positive about the range of information that they received when applying for GRCF Round 2. This suggests that the additional information provided to applicants in GRCF Round 2 was welcome and beneficial.

Throughout the lifetime of the programme, the rationale behind and the need for the GRCF have remained clear. Projects felt that it came at the 'right time' (when jobs and future eNGO project delivery were at risk). This suggests that GRCF Round 2 successfully supported economic recovery of organisations post-COVID-19 in line with its key aims.

Projects also reported that the GRCF funding allowed them to keep staff that they would have otherwise had to make redundant. Moreover, the GRCF provided eNGOs with more time to seek out longer-term funding to secure roles beyond their GRCF project. In many cases, staff have been able to remain in their post, whilst in others, staff have moved on to other roles within the environmental sector. Overall, this is a positive finding because it suggests that GRCF investment is being retained within the sector.

The GRCF allowed projects to recruit applicants who were different from those that they would usually hire to support and train a more diverse workforce. This resulted in many projects recruiting individuals who had just left school with no work experience nor sector-specific qualifications, which, in turn, allowed projects to see

value in the positive impact of a more diverse workforce. This aligns well with wider policy objectives looking to ensure that the sector is inclusive and diverse. However, training and support costs, particularly for new staff and apprentices, were identified by a minority of eNGOs as a challenge. Whilst eNGOs likely knew that hiring apprentices who were new to the sector would incur training costs, said projects reported that the resource requirements and the support needs were greater than they had anticipated. Whilst these concerns are understandable, particularly due to the seasonality of some project delivery, it is important to highlight that standard apprenticeship posts are set over a 6–12-month period, suggesting that an 18-month role will offer sufficient time for a new staff member to undertake training and undertake project delivery.

Recommendation One: Within future funding programmes, eNGOs should be advised to co-recruit staff, apprentices and/or trainees by sharing recruitment, induction, and in-work support responsibilities with project partners. This will ensure that the resource burden is shared and that those in supported roles receive a wide range of support from across project partners.

The competitiveness of the salaries that organisations were able to offer was also identified as a barrier when looking to recruit staff. It was identified that eNGO roles are typically lower-paid than roles in the private sector; as a result, projects were unable to offer higher salaries for their GRCF Round 2 roles. This concern was perceived to be exacerbated by increasingly competitive job markets during the pandemic recovery as well as increasingly higher wage trends across the UK. However, it is important to note that there was not a set GRCF maximum project spend for role costs, and projects were able to set their own wage requirements within project bids.

Recommendation Two: Future funding programmes should consider sharing additional guidance with applicants regarding how to enhance their employment offer, e.g. changing their role promotion approaches and amending role wages in line with best-practice standards within the sector.

Projects frequently reported that the GRCF provided them with the opportunity to ‘test or pilot’ working with new partners or organisations with which they had engaged but had never directly worked. For many eNGOs, this solidified ways of working, as well as increasing confidence that they would be able to work with GRCF partners again in the future. GRCF Round 2 project delivery also required eNGOs to work with local landowners, which was a new experience for many eNGOs. The majority of projects were able to identify key benefits as a result of working with their respective partners, e.g. strengthening existing working relationships and improving the knowledge of partner systems, enabling them to work together in the longer term. This demonstrates that the GRCF has successfully supported eNGOs in creating long-term and sustainable changes to their own organisations.

At the end of project delivery, the majority of GRCF Round 2 projects reported that they had largely delivered activity against GRCF themes as anticipated. This

suggests that proposed activity outlined in project bids was realistic and achievable and that where challenges were faced, they were overcome.

Across both rounds of the GRCF, key challenges for project delivery were frequently associated with project timelines. Whilst the GRCF is a short-term and competitive fund, many projects faced difficulties in delivery due to unfavourable weather conditions and suggested that the pressure to deliver was exacerbated by delivering over one cycle of seasons.

Recommendation Three: Revised recruitment strategies should consider the pressured timeline for the delivery of nature-based projects, particularly where there is the delivery of outdoor conservation, restoration, and nature-based solutions, which needs to occur in a particular season. Where possible, application award deadlines should be set to give projects considerable time to implement project delivery and recruit before the typical UK growing season starts to ensure that providers have sufficient time to deliver.

It is important to highlight that perceptions of management and governance across the GRCF were positive. Projects stated that it felt like they were 'working with' the Heritage Fund to deliver outcomes. Projects felt that this way of working was effective, particularly praising the flexibility afforded to them by the Heritage Fund to adapt delivery where required.

Recommendation Four: Future funding programmes should look to retain the flexible approach utilised within GRCF Round 2; however, projects should also be reminded that their initial bids are expected to account for contingency risks (e.g. wage inflation and material cost increases).

10.2. Impact

As highlighted above, GRCF Round 2 project delivery has directly benefitted 122,318ha and 587km of land across England and resulted in 616,811 trees being planted. This impact makes a direct and considerable contribution to the 25YEP and EIP in bringing protected sites into a favourable condition by 2042, and to the UK Government's aim of having 12 per cent woodland cover across England by 2050 (as outlined in the 2021 [England Trees Action Plan](#)) to meet net zero targets.

Projects were also able to provide a wide range of examples which combined activities based on conservation, restoration, and nature-based solutions. This demonstrates how a range of activity at GRCF project sites has symbiotically created improved nature across England.

The physical creation, restoration or building of nature-based solutions has helped eNGOs to develop sustainable infrastructure, suggesting that GRCF Round 2 projects have delivered positive impacts on biodiversity, habitat quality, and ecosystem health across England. The GRCF has enhanced the projects' local natural environment, making it more resilient and better equipped to support a wide range of species.

Whilst many projects are unable to measure and identify the longer-term positive impact of their projects within the timeframe of GRCF project delivery, GRCF funding has enabled and encouraged projects to put in place data collection systems to ensure that longer-term impacts on nature can be evidenced.

Recommendation Five: Flexibility in funding requirements to accommodate eNGOs setting up sustainable practices of data collection that can be used in the longer term should be encouraged and adopted in future funding programmes. This will ensure that short-term, competitive funds can still effectively support nature-based projects.

Whilst a wide range of data have been collected across the GRCF which can evidence the wide-ranging impact of project delivery, monitoring options have been commonly broad and open-ended. This has limited the extent to which some impact analysis could be undertaken.

Recommendation Six: Future funding programmes should offer projects additional guidance and clarity as to the information that will be required of them at the project implementation stage, which would allow them to develop their own evidence-gathering mechanisms more effectively.

GRCF Round 2 project activity to connect people with nature resulted in 244,340 people being engaged in 16,779 events. In addition, it resulted in 50 projects installing or creating 416 elements of infrastructure. This includes 192km of footpaths, 37km of fences, and 8km of boardwalks.

When asked in workshops and the Wave 2 survey, projects also broadly felt able to connect people with nature, but targeted activity to engage people disconnected from nature was less commonplace. Where this was the case, projects reported that more time and resource would be needed to effectively engage with underserved groups. However, the use of GRCF monies to recruit for new outreach or volunteer coordinator roles was a key enabler of effective engagement-based activity. Projects described new outreach and coordinator roles as enabling them to better reach new community groups and audiences and better target volunteer efforts towards project delivery.

Across GRCF Round 2, 876 jobs have been directly supported, equating to 580 FTE jobs. Additionally, GRCF Round 2 project activity has supported 553 full-time indirect jobs. This confirms that GRCF Round 2 has actively supported employment within the environmental sector, driving investment in green jobs and skills across England in line with the Green Jobs Taskforce 2021 recommendations.

Projects were positive about the impact that GRCF Round 2 has had on their own organisational capacity and resilience, reporting that it has increased capacity through the recruitment of new staff and the retainment of staff at risk of redundancy. Additionally, projects reported that GRCF Round 2 has enabled their organisation to diversify their service offer, secure funding via other funding streams, access new markets due to working on new sites, and approach project delivery in new ways.

However, when compared with sector-wide averages, GRCF Round 2 equalities data indicate that projects have only been able to support increased diversity within the sector in a limited way.

Recommendation Seven: To ensure that future funding programmes are directly and positively contributing to sector-wide efforts to develop a more inclusive and more diverse workforce and engage new and diverse audiences, additional guidance should be sought from across the sector and disseminated to projects at the funding application stage. This will allow all eNGOs to explore new methods of recruitment and/or engagement and reflect on their own processes of equity, diversity and inclusion practices.

10.3. Value for Money and Sustainability

The GRCF funded 159 projects across England to support nature recovery, conservation, and wider-sector resilience. Projects received a total of £37.8m directly from the GRCF and £11.1m of match funding, with projects costing a total of just under £49m. Overall, the programme offered good value for money, with high additionality of the funding, attracting considerable match funding and in-kind contributions, and a widespread impact of project activities.

GRCF Round 2 projects reported overwhelmingly that it was unlikely that they would have secured the relevant outcomes for their projects without the GRCF funding. Where projects delivered activity based on conservation, restoration, and nature-based solutions, they reported that without the GRCF they would not have been able to fund capital and large-scale habitat works. Where projects delivered activity based on connecting people with nature, they reported that without the GRCF they would not have been able to dedicate staff time to delivering activities and building relationships with project partners and communities. This demonstrates the added value and the perceived necessity of GRCF Round 2.

In final workshops, projects were incredibly positive about the value for money delivered by the GRCF. In particular, projects highlighted the range of intangible and immeasurable benefits of the project which contributed to the value for money of GRCF Round 2. These included the relationships built between project partners, landowners, contractors, community groups, and the public, the positive experiences of those engaged in project activities, and the ongoing benefit to the environment in relation to biodiversity and climate change.

At the end of GRCF Round 2 project delivery, almost half of all surveyed eNGOs confirmed that they have secured additional funding to continue their project activities in the longer term, whilst the majority of other projects are still hoping to secure funding to maintain project delivery in the future. In total, projects have received an additional £6.7m in funding post-GRCF. This demonstrates that eNGO engagement in the GRCF has effectively supported additional investment in the sector in the longer term.

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