

**Name:** Fife Rural Skills Partnership

**Place:** Fife

### **Headline**

Fife Rural Skills Partnership (FRSP) is a collaborative social enterprise set up to “increase training and capacity of social enterprises that contribute to the management and enterprising use of Fife’s woodland, farmland and rural landscape.” Forestry is a key focus.

### **Keywords:**

Third sector; umbrella body; social enterprise; rural skills; adding value; supporting small-scale woodland management; training; partnership; and capacity building.

### **What is the context?**

FRSP operates solely within Fife although it has shared its experience much further afield. It was set up in 2013 to address current and anticipated skill gaps within forestry and wider land based sector and the availability of locally based people to fill those gaps.

Fife is a real mix of urban and rural settings, however there has been a tendency in the past for people from urban areas not to get involved in employment in the rural sector. It was also felt that there was a lot of untapped potential in modest scale woodlands around Fife. Research commissioned by the Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership to drill down into what was required locally in Fife, found a vast majority of forestry employers who are micro businesses, a demand for more people entering the sector, and some perception issues from both employers and potential entrants to the sector. Employers perceived a lack of availability of trustworthy and reliable workforce, and potential entrants perceived the work as low paid and dirty. The FRSP set out to change these perceptions by providing experiences to those who had never been involved in the sector before or who had never had the opportunity to be involved. It also set out to improve co-ordination, innovate and to work with employers to produce training programmes that met their needs in terms of a future workforce.

### **Partners include**

- Living Solutions a social enterprise that works mainly with unemployed young people, giving them opportunities to learn and gain skills in a work environment.
- Fife Employment Access Trust supporting people with mental health problems to find and sustain work and managing Silverburn park in Leven.
- Cambo Heritage Trust provides learning, training and volunteering opportunities in environment, heritage, arts, culture and horticulture using Cambo estate’s resources
- The Ecology Centre provides environmental education, volunteers opportunities and training placements whilst managing a diverse site at Kinghorn Loch.
- Rural Skills Scotland a not-for-profit sharing organisation established to provide high quality, professional training for the rural sector.
- Fife Works, hosted by Kingdom Housing Association, supports individuals from all over Fife into employment and training opportunities.
- Fife Voluntary Action ensures the third sector is robust, resilient and delivers high quality services for the people of Fife.

- Falkland Stewardship Trust, based on Falkland Estate, offers a range of training and volunteering opportunities in the rural sector with particular focus on supporting young unemployed from more disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Fife Council supporting the people of Fife into employment or training.
- Forestry Commission Scotland who are keen to encourage the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce for the future.

### **What was the initial aim?**

Our agreed aim is to *“increase training and capacity of social enterprises that contribute to the management and enterprising use of Fife’s woodland, farmland and rural landscape.”*

Our objectives are:

- To increase opportunities to those unemployed or underemployed
- To support and develop a range of placements and route-ways to employment
- To increase the capacity of the third sector to contribute to Fife’s rural environment
- To support member groups to provide and sustain high quality services
- To create sustainable approaches to delivering training and jobs

### **What actually happened, and what has been achieved?**

As well as skills and qualifications, some examples of work on the ground include:

1. Conservation of a ten acre community woodland outside Markinch, inc. removal of invasive species and the restoration of paths for the community to use.
2. Skilled conservation work (felling, pollarding and replacing) on a historic Lime avenue on Falkland Estate involving tree climbing and chainsaw work at height
3. Clearance of over ten acres of rhododendron and giant hogweed.
4. 25km of paths have been upgraded or created.
5. Planting thousands of trees.
6. Restoration of 100s of metres of walls, using lime mortar techniques.

The partnership went through a period of visioning, planning, objective setting and trying to find better ways of working together. A business plan was produced and the partnership became a company limited by guarantee, in order to provide opportunities to attract funding and to employ staff in the future. Fife Council saw an opportunity to work with FRSP to deliver on their employability targets by working with the group, and to design and implement a social procurement strategy, providing the third sector with an improved opportunity to gain access to contracted work.

Building on the success of projects being run by individual partners such as the Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership and a Coastal Communities Fund project delivering forestry apprenticeships in one of Fife’s most deprived areas, the FRSP could begin to demonstrate demand, and attract funding to deliver more cross-partnership working. FRSP, with Falkland Stewardship Trust as the lead partner, was recently successful in attracting £1M from the Big Lottery/Wildlife Trust’s Our Bright Future Fund - a five-year programme to upscale the activity we have delivered to date.

We have also delivered short-term rural skills training academies which give participants a

taste of working in the sector. This has seen us work with lone parents, people with varying support needs and those who previously offended, and has led to a number of people progressing onto forestry apprenticeships.

We have begun to better knit programmes together, for example by working with the Employability Fund managed by Fife Council to run pre-apprenticeship courses, and additional certified training adding value to apprenticeships and other training programmes. The partnership has benefitted significantly through support from Community Jobs Scotland and the Fife Job Contract, and is beginning to explore new avenues for new business creation, such as social enterprises, micro businesses, co-operatives etc. Having come through a particularly busy period, partners have agreed to review the aims and action plan to give a refreshed sense of direction over the next few years.

### **Evidence of outcomes**

- The number of people taking part in rural skills development opportunities across the Partnership
- The number of 'positive destinations' for those young unemployed participants in Rural Skills Academies and Apprenticeships who we see go on to secure jobs in the rural sector and/or further education
- The positive impact of programmes on the health and well being of those involved
- The skills development shared and gained through volunteering, work experience and mentoring activities
- Engagement with primary and secondary aged school children introducing them to the environment and inspiring them and their teachers along the way
- The positive impact this work has made to the environment
- The on-going commitment of funders to support this work



*"I think it's a good place to work and the opportunities are great. There's a good balance of practical and theory work involved. I also think the rural skills academy is good and gives people an understanding of the apprenticeship and rural skills before applying".*

***William Smith, Modern Apprentice***

## **What are the key lessons?**

### Strengths:

- Evidence based skills and training gap to be filled
- Collective knowledge and expertise
- Accessing resources to deliver
- Adding value to what the individual partners can deliver
- Innovative and relatively barrier free approaches to trying new methods of training
- Strong public sector support – Fife Council and Forestry Commission

### Weaknesses:

- Lack of dedicated resource for the partnership can mean that things take longer to deliver
- The number of partners involved with FRSP could be much wider, especially employers.
- It has taken quite some time to deliver truly partnership projects rather than just a collection of individual efforts.

## **How replicable is this experience; what is its potential as an element of a better approach to forestry?**

The concept of a Rural Skills Partnership is extremely replicable. One of our partners, Rural Skills Scotland, has done some work in Tayside and Angus looking to establish something similar in that area with support from the Forestry Commission. There have also been “umbrella” organisations operating in other parts of Scotland for some time. However, the main issue relating to replication is the availability and willingness of partners. In Fife that has mainly consisted of the Third Sector and the Public Sector, in other areas it might be between employers, or land managers and colleges or schools.

### **Key messages:**

- FRSP has demonstrated well the enormous potential of such partnerships to achieve far more than the sum of the parts and more than anticipated, even two years ago.
- This is most measurable through the number of people who have taken part in rural skills academies and/or longer-term apprenticeships of a year or more.
- The work has also led to real improvements to the landscape – restored paths in the uplands, enhanced woodlands, removal of invasive species and increased access to attractive historic designed landscapes.
- It takes a lot of work and at this point a continuing drive to identify resources to increase the work we are involved in. However, with the strong commitment from a dedicated group of partners we have delivered results and will continue to do so over the coming years.
- To find out more please visit our website [www.fiferuralskills.com](http://www.fiferuralskills.com) or [FRSP Facebook](#) page.