



PRESS RELEASE

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Apprenticeship awards help young people get careers in rural skills

Two awards have been launched to mark an educational charity's 70th anniversary, to help young people gain apprenticeships in countryside-based careers.

The Ernest Cook Trust has awarded two Platinum Jubilee Awards, part of its Outdoor Futures Grants programme, one to the Dry Stone Walling Association and the other to the National Hedgelaying Society.

Each award, worth £15,000 a year for three years, will fund apprentices to learn the traditional skills of dry stone walling and hedgelaying.

The Ernest Cook Trust is a UK-wide educational charity, which creates outdoor learning experiences for children, young people and their families, on its own estates and with partner estates across the country.

Suzie Paton, Head of Grants at Trust, said: "It can be difficult for young people to get into these traditional crafts, especially if they don't come from a farming background, so with our two Platinum Jubilee Awards we wanted to open up new opportunities."

The Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA) already has its first apprentice in place. Another is due to start next year, and a third in 2024.

David Da Costa, 17, from Skipton, is spending his year-long apprenticeship working alongside master craftsman Philip Dolphin. Without the apprenticeship, David, who does not have a farming background, says it would have been difficult to find an opening.

"I don't come from a farming family but I really love the outdoors," he said. "I've been taking photos out and about for four years now and every time I go out, I love to look at the dry stone walls and question how they were made.

"I had the opportunity to do a trial day with Phil and I got really into it. Since I started the apprenticeship, I've found it's really enjoyable and I am learning a lot. I don't think it would have happened without The Ernest Cook Trust award, but everything came together. I started talking to Phil, he was happy to take me on, and then this apprenticeship made it possible."

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Kate Dymock, Training & Education Coordinator for the DSWA, said: “One of our key aims is to promote the knowledge and understanding of this traditional craft, and to try and get young people on board so we keep that knowledge going through the generations. This is why the Platinum Jubilee Award from The Ernest Cook Trust is invaluable and we are very grateful that, thanks to this, we will be able to fund three apprentices.”

David Whitaker, Secretary of the National Hedgelaying Society, said: “We have a lot of people interested in learning the craft of hedgelaying, so we run a national accreditation scheme, and we also have a training scheme for those who want to get into hedgelaying as a career.

“We’re looking for people with an interest in rural skills, and they don’t need to have an agricultural background. There is such a shortage of people that if anyone wants to go into hedgelaying they are going to be guaranteed a job. The work is there for them.”

For more about the Dry Stone Walling Association and apprenticeship opportunities, visit <https://www.dswa.org.uk/>. For the National Hedgelaying Society, and its apprenticeship opportunities, visit <https://www.hedgelaying.org.uk/>. For more information about The Ernest Cook Trust visit <https://ernestcooktrust.org.uk/>.

