

## Forest park agreement will boost jobless work hopes



Unemployed people in Neath Port Talbot are finding a route back into work – by helping to maintain one of South Wales’s most popular outdoor tourist attractions.

They are all members of the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council’s Skills and Training team, which has joined forces with Forestry Commission Wales to manage the 200 kilometres of trails within Afan Forest Park.

The team members, who are all out of work but on training programmes, will help to maintain the walking trails, picnic areas and seating, as well as carrying out more specialised work on Afan’s world class mountain bike routes which draw thousands of visitors to the area every year.

Forestry Commission Wales has drawn up an agreement with the council, with whom it jointly manages the park, under its new ‘Woodlands And You’ programme which aims to help people who want to organise activities, events and projects in Welsh Government woodlands.

Under the new agreement, which follows the conclusion of a trial period to assess the arrangements, the team will spend up to three days a week working in the forest park. Forestry Commission Wales community ranger Jonathan Price said, “The contribution the team makes to the ongoing management of important facilities within the Afan Forest Park is excellent. The park provides rural jobs and brings valuable economic benefits to the area, so the importance of this work done by the Skills and Training team can’t be under-estimated.”

In addition to forming a vital part of the overall management of the facilities in the area, the work carried out by the team will provide excellent training and opportunities to learn new skills to help them back into employment.

Leader of Neath Port Talbot Council, Ali Thomas, said, “The council is committed to doing all it can to provide training opportunities for young people in the county borough. The Skills and Training Unit is doing an exceptional job providing schemes and projects designed to give young people the skills they need to find work in today’s employment market. I am pleased to see that partnership working between Forestry Commission Wales and the council is paying dividends and these young people are reaping the benefits.”

Paul Williams, Sector Manager for the council’s Skills and Training Unit, said, “We have worked with Afan Forest Park and Forestry Commission Wales over a number of years and this is a great example of the benefits of partnership working. “The bespoke training opportunities that have been provided have helped secure full time employment for

many people. Forestry Commission Wales has recognised the importance of the training and also the high quality standards that have been achieved within the park.”

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

A total of 14.3 per cent of Wales is covered by woodlands. Of this, 38% (126,000 hectares/311,000 acres) is owned by the Welsh Government. Forestry Commission Wales is the Welsh Government’s department of forestry and manages these woodlands on its behalf.

The Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council’s Skills and Training team offers a number of learning opportunities to the residents of the Neath Port Talbot County Borough. The Afan Forest Park option is an excellent example of how local unemployed residents can work within the community and learn skills on the way. The partnership work with Forestry Commission Wales has enabled over 100 local residents to be trained, many of whom are now employed locally.

For more information on learning opportunities at Skills and Training, contact 01639 636467.

For more information on recreation activities within Afan Forest Park, contact Jonathan Price on 0300 068 0213, mobile 07789 922748, email [jonathan.price@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jonathan.price@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

More information on the woodlands of Wales is available on [www.forestry.gov.uk/wales](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/wales)  
Visit [News@FCWales](mailto:News@FCWales) for news, images, press office contact details and links to case studies.

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