

Press Release

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Agency looks to women to safeguard environment

Welsh women could well become the next line of defence when it comes to tackling the effects of climate change and helping conserve Wales' natural environments.

For the past two weeks, eight women from across North Wales have been inspecting flood defences, river banks, tidal flap doors, sampling water reserves and all manner of other activities associated with biodiversity and conservation with a view to embarking on a new career.

Part of an innovative course aimed at encouraging more women into non-traditional training and employment opportunities, it has been developed in partnership with Environment Agency Wales, and is the latest in a series of free courses run by Chwarae Teg as part of the Ready SET Go Project.

The *Change Your Environment* course which is taking place at Llanrwst in Conwy and Bodfordd in Anglesey allows the female trainees to spend three days a week for three weeks getting an insight into the work of Environment Agency Wales's flood defence specialists, and their vision for a better environment now and in the future.



Claire Wray and Alison Winterbottom clearing the river banks in Mochdra, near Colwyn Bay

One of the eight women who signed up to the course as a stepping stone to a new career is 39-year old Claire Wray, a former accountant and small business owner from Dwyrain near Llanfair Pwll:

"I've often read articles about the Environment Agency but thought that the kind of work involved with conservation was more geared towards men, so hadn't really considered this field before", explains Claire.

"The course has not only been a great introduction to their work but also in helping me make decisions about the future, and realise that I could potentially have a good career in what many people think is a traditionally male dominated field."

Claire's husband is already doing an Access to Science course with the aim of going on to do a degree in Environmental Science, so is determined not to get left behind and has been making the most of the career and training advice by Careers Wales as part of the course and spent time speaking with women already working as flood defence specialists at the Agency.

"After 20 years accountancy I knew that it wasn't for me anymore so on the days that I'm not out in the field training, I've been looking for higher education courses linked with the environment or conservation, and hope to be able to start a course soon", continues Claire.

"Another great spin off of course is knowing I'm doing my bit to safeguard the environment."

Tracey Lloyd-Williams, Project Coordinator for Ready, SET, Go said: "It's just as important for us to provide opportunities that will result in suitable and sustainable employment for the women on our courses as it is to work with employers to help them fill skills gaps.

"These courses are designed specifically to encourage women to consider occupations outside traditional arenas and by working with Environment Agency Wales, we have been able to help them create a more diverse and stable workforce and demonstrate the opportunities that are attainable regardless of gender."

To date, Chwarae Teg has helped more than 300 women experience and secure careers outside traditional female roles, many of which have gone on to excel in their chosen career. Courses have included Burning Ambitions, a taster course for the fire services, DIY, plumbing and carpentry courses.

Iwan Thomas, speaking for the Agency said: "We are really pleased to be taking part in this project with Chwarae Teg and welcome anyone with an interest in our work. We are fully committed to equal opportunities at Environment Agency Wales and we want different kinds of people from all backgrounds to help us create a better Wales."

For more information about Ready, SET, Go courses visit www.chwaraeteg.com.

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Interviews with Chwarae Teg and the Environment Agency are available on request.

About Ready SET Go

Chwarae Teg was established in 1992 to support, develop and expand the role of women in the Welsh economy and has undertaken a number of projects which have directly assisted women in the areas of enterprise, employment and learning. The Ready SET Go project is managed by Chwarae Teg, part-funded by DELLS, Careers Wales and ESF (European Social Fund) and covers 13 local authorities in the Objective One area.