

Student Hub: CV and Interview Tips

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Marketing Officer, CIEEM

You know when you do that thing you really shouldn't do? Your knee hurts a little, so you Google the symptoms... Big mistake. Within 30 seconds you're 100% convinced that death is just around the corner.

Well, I just did that with careers in ecology and environmental management and can now fully appreciate how terrifying trying to get your first job in the sector can be. Here are a couple of highlights:

- "The work is repetitive but at least the pay is bad."
- "Reptile surveys? Better be on a site damn early to catch things whilst they're still trying to warm up. Bat surveys? Better not like sleeping. Newt surveys? Better not like sleeping and enjoy getting wet."

I was about ready to give up writing this piece before I'd even started, but then I remembered two things:

1. The internet exists for people to complain (and cat memes).
2. Some of the smartest, kindest, most passionate people I have ever met have worked in the environmental sector.

You know why? Because they went into the profession out of a genuine concern for nature. They embarked on this career because they couldn't see themselves doing anything else with their lives and that's the best reason in the world. It's people like that who make humanity bearable (bats are still better, obviously). Sure, the pay isn't banker-level, but salaries are improving as the sector becomes more professional.

So, don't be put off. You've come this far, and you joined CIEEM because we can help you. And we will. We've picked the brains of members from every branch of the sector,

from academics to consultants and compiled some top tips for nailing your interview technique. We will also be launching a new Mentoring Platform very soon (see page 48), so you can get a helping hand from someone who's been there, done that and loves what they do so much that they want to give something back.

Harriet Webb – Principal Ecologist, Environment, Maritime and Resilience, Jacobs

- Make your CV look professional. Stalk some key players on LinkedIn and use the format of their CV.
- Work experience, volunteer, volunteer and volunteer some more! Being involved with bat groups, amphibian and reptile groups etc. will help you generate awareness of yourself in the industry.

Bethany Lovell – Advisor, National Biodiversity (Regulation & Compliance), Environment Agency

- However much you want the interview to be over, if there's something you wished you'd said, or you feel you didn't get across clearly, ask if you can have a minute to explain. Better to do that than to leave the interview regretting that you missed an opportunity.
- Whatever the outcome of your interview, it's good to try and get feedback so you can learn for the future.

Chris Gerrard – Natural Catchment and Biodiversity Manager, Anglian Water Services

- If you know there's a weakness in your CV, be honest and upfront about it and don't just hope it won't come up – it probably will. Explain how you'll overcome it.
- Always, always, always have questions to ask at the end. It shows you're interested and gives you a further opportunity to impress them.

Chris Smillie – Programme Leader: MSc Countryside Management, Scotland's Rural College

- The interviewer will be asking questions about you (an opening question is often 'take me through your CV'), so make sure you know your skills inside out. Don't spend all your time looking at the job requirements instead.
- Always give examples. It's no use just saying you are good at teamworking – give an example of where you have demonstrated those skills.

Jackie Jobes – Manager, Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership

- Think about your own work/life balance and consider the workplace environment. The way we work is changing, but many businesses aren't keeping up and are still stuck in the 9-5 routine of the last century. Asking for flexible working is still such a taboo, which will and must change to attract and retain the next generation. It's important that people are aware of the opportunity for a more balanced lifestyle and have the courage to challenge the status quo.

Sue Lawley – County Ecologist, Staffordshire County Council

- Practice – even if your Mum is fed up with hearing about your newt handling skills!
- Understand that being an ecologist involves hours spent in the office writing reports. Don't imply you want to work in ecology because you want to be outside all the time – it can sound like you have unrealistic expectations.

For more top tips and insider experience, tune into our webinar on 24 October 2019.