

Student Hub: Gaining Valuable Work Experience

Amidst all the exams, the coursework and celebrations, it's easy to forget that soon you will be catapulted into a highly competitive job market and looking for that dream role. As Ollie Ramm, Director of RammSanderson notes: *"Employers receive hundreds of applications from graduates every year. There are fewer jobs available than there are candidates, meaning competition between candidates is rife. You need to stand out from the crowd, show an interest in the company or make contact to be selected over your peers."*

Employers are looking for candidates who can demonstrate at least some basic skills in technical and transferrable activities. CIEEM's Competency Framework is a great starting point to help you see what kind of skills employers are looking for. If you don't feel like you're there yet, work experience can be a great way of defining your skill set and showcasing your potential. You could gain relevant skills in paid work, volunteer or intern roles within or beyond the environmental sector; read on for our suggestions on how to get the most from your experience.

- ✓ List the skills you want to develop.
- ✓ Expect employers to offer you training, management and support to develop the skills and knowledge you want to gain.
- ✓ Plan interview questions to find out if an opening really will help you build the skills you need and how you'll be supported.
- ✓ However exciting an organisation may seem, avoid accepting a role that doesn't offer you scope to build the skills and knowledge you need.
- ✓ Keep a portfolio documenting the skills and experience you are building – many online websites can help you prepare a basic, shareable portfolio which allows you to set up a basic professional portfolio for free and include images, files, weblinks and videos that you can share with potential employers via one URL.

- ✓ Make sure you get your portfolio endorsed by relevant staff during work experience.
- ✓ Find out as much background as you can about projects you're involved in and further work that's planned. Read follow up reports and talk to other project staff to develop your understanding of the sector.

Additional benefits of work experience include:

- Gaining an insight into workplace etiquette and conducting business relationships.
- Acquiring hands-on skills and knowledge that you might not have had the chance to develop at university.
- Finding out what you're actually interested in! There are a range of roles and opportunities in the profession; work experience enables you to figure out the career direction you want to follow.
- Building connections who you can approach for recommendations and guidance when you graduate and start applying for vacancies.

Robyn Thompson is studying on a CIEEM-accredited degree BSc Biological Sciences (Ecology and Environmental Management). Robyn undertook work experience within the Estates department at Nottingham Trent University:

"During my work experience as the 'Environmental Engagement Assistant' in the Environment Team at Nottingham Trent University, I was actively involved in maintaining and updating the institution's ISO 14001 and EcoCampus Environmental Management Systems. I also supported staff and student sustainability engagement initiatives; creating and managing my own projects, for example; new social media channels and a medium-sized allotment volunteering scheme. This fantastic experience greatly developed my knowledge in numerous areas of sustainability which has both supported my final year studies and helped me recognise the type of environmental management career I intend to pursue post-graduation!"

Box 1. Where can you find out about work experience opportunities?

- Environment Jobs
– www.environmentjob.co.uk
- Countryside Jobs Service (CJS)
– www.countryside-jobs.com
- Conservation Jobs
– www.conservationjobs.co.uk
- Direct approaches to employers in the CIEEM Professional Directory
- CIEEM Jobs board
– www.cieem.net/jobs
- Linked In – Search for or request work experience opportunities