

Firing ambition: what turns people on to forestry as a career



SKILLS and training are at the top of the agenda for the arboriculture and forestry sectors in Britain, and it has never been more important to understand what inspires and motivates people to take up forestry and related disciplines as a career, says RFS education manager Ted Wilson.

He adds, "The issue of recruitment to the

forestry sector is critical – we know we are facing a skills gap in the foreseeable future. Forestry has an ageing population with only around 11% of forestry employees aged under 25, but 33% aged over 50. Many in the profession will retire in the next 15 years. We need to attract a new generation of entrants who can embrace the challenges we face from environmental change, pests and disease and the opportunities provided by technology and research to ensure a thriving forestry sector for the future.

"What we are hearing is that early childhood, teenage, and young adult experiences often shape career ambitions. However, young people in particular are also motivated to work in sectors with excellent training, skills development and career progression pathways. In a highly competitive careers marketplace, forestry needs to present itself as ambitious, dynamic and exciting in order to attract new talent.

"But it is not just interesting jobs; there is a need to consider the long-term career prospects for future job security – something that everyone, especially parents, are concerned about. Unfortunately, the historic situation has led to a public perception that arboriculture and forestry are low-skill industries. So, we have a challenge on our hands promoting forestry as the highly skilled, technological and dynamic profession that it is today."

More than 70 organisations, including the Royal Forestry Society (RFS), are supporting the Charter for Trees, Woods and People (Tree Charter) which will be launched in November 2017. As part of their Future Foresters programme, supported by the Prince's Countryside Trust, the RFS has been speaking to active members of the Tree Charter Student Council, about their career choices and their future career ambitions. Their response shows that our young professionals identify diverse career directions and opportunities as making a positive difference in society by working in the forestry sector.

The RFS Future Foresters Project is encouraging more people from all backgrounds to enter the forestry sector and support them through their learning and development through studentships, bursaries, qualifications and a range of learning development events. Find out more at www.rfs.org.uk/learning/future-foresters/



GEORGE DENNISON

George, Bangor University, MFor, grew up in the Derbyshire dales exploring woodlands and other landscapes whilst having a weekend job working with a local river bailiff to gain experience in environmental management.

He says, "Within forest ecosystems I'm very passionate about

mycorrhizal populations and how trees are connected via the wood wide web. Resource sharing, among other things, between individual trees of the same and also different species via these mycorrhizal networks is simply incredible. Trees within a forest system being able to forewarn one another of pests and pathogens, and communicate to increase seed production during mast years; there is a lot we still don't know about the subject and that mystery attracts me to the subject. I'm still unsure as to where exactly I want to end up. I feel that forestry is a very fluid career path which you can manipulate and mould to your own specification, which you wouldn't necessarily be able to do in other careers. I enjoy using forestry to travel and visit various projects and biomes to see how environments change within the UK as well as globally."



SAM HOBSON

Sam, University of Worcester, BSc Arboriculture, currently an arboricultural consultant at Wharton Tree and Ecology Consultants, has changed careers after working as a designer in an office environment.

"I have always loved spending time in woodland and outdoors in general. When the time and

opportunity came to look at a change in career I took it with both hands! I can't think of anything better than going out to work in a woodland on a fresh morning.

"My degree and job role have led me to being more involved in trees in relation to development. I find this to be a very interesting and rewarding area of work. Trees have a vital role to play in our urban environments, and having the opportunity to help developers achieve this without losing important trees is great. I am also fascinated with tree-related law and legislation – applied to everyday work it can be an interesting subject."

Looking ten years ahead he says, "I would like to develop my woodland management skills further and feed this into the work I get involved in day-to-day. From a more long-term perspective I suppose I will remain in a consultancy environment and aim for a more senior role. I have a young family so supporting them through school, etc. is my main aim. A big ambition of mine is to purchase some woodland of my own with a view to building and living in, or next to, the woods – we will see about that one!"



DEWI ROEBUCK

Dewi, Bangor University, BSc Forestry, says he has always been an outdoorsy person, but it was a family holiday in 2003 to Canada that set him on the road towards forestry. "We visited a paper mill and the forests that supplied the mill; seeing how the whole process worked

sparked an interest in me. What really caught my attention was how the forest was productive, but conservation of the ecosystem itself was of high importance, and a balance was achieved so that the goals of production and conservation could both be met without hindering one another, which I really liked. I believe that sustainability is the key to a well-managed forest."

He is particularly interested in forest management and the development of woodlands, whether it be ancient woodland restoration, management of plantation forests, afforestation or anything in between. "I see silviculture as an art, one that if done right can be beneficial to all inhabitants of the forest ecosystem, as well as providing humans with essential ecosystem services, such as timber production, recreation areas, food, and fuel."



NIALL WILLIAMS

Niall studied forestry at Sparsholt Agricultural College and is now studying for a Landscape Architecture BA, at Birmingham City University. It was childhood walks in the woods or on estates with parents and, as he got older, splitting logs at the weekends for his

grandparents to earn pocket money which led him to first consider forestry as a career.

After completing his forestry studies at Sparsholt, it was while working on a small farm and in project management that he found he preferred large-scale design and planning, such as catchment-level flood planning, or masterplanning. Whilst switching more towards landscape architecture, trees remain at the forefront of his thinking: "You really get to look at the bigger picture, and small street planting schemes begin to become part of a much larger network. You can begin to blur the lines between urban and rural, and replace hard landscaped solutions with softer alternatives such as Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). Whilst you're never going to create large forests in an urban environment, the more of these systems you can get in place, the closer we can get to recreating more natural processes, to the benefit of all."