



ENVIRONMENTAL CAREERS FESTIVAL

19th - 26th April 2021
RESOURCE PACK

BELFAST HILLS ENVIRONMENTAL CAREERS RESOURCE PACK

The Belfast Hills Partnership held an online Environmental Careers Festival from **19th – 26th April 2021**, to give people an awareness of the types of jobs and organisations that are out there, along with employability tips.

We posted digital content across our social media throughout the festival, that included inspiring footage of environmental work taking place on the ground in the Belfast Hills and beyond; showcasing a range of careers to illustrate the broad roles available. In addition to this, we also encouraged young people to get in touch with us through our social media pages, to ask any questions about environmental careers. We also had a local environmental consultant from MCL Consulting, who volunteered to review CV's. This was all in the lead up to an online environmental employability workshop on Monday 26th April, which included panellists and a live Q&A.

This resource pack is a summary of the digital content from the festival and a collation of the questions we were asked. We hope that it will be a useful tool for anyone hoping to get an environmental job, or any teachers/lecturers who help young people with their employability.

The festival was funded by The National Lottery Community Fund's Our Bright Future project, a forward-thinking social movement that's about supporting young people to lead progressive change in their communities and local environment. The Our Bright Future campaign came up with three Asks, based on more than 700 ideas from young people. These Asks aim to address issues that affect both young people and the environment and set out the changes to society, young people want to happen. One of these asks was for young people to get more support into environmental jobs. Therefore, it is the hope of the Belfast Hills Partnership, that our Environmental Careers Festival and this resource pack, will go some way to achieving this.

For more information, contact patricia.deeney@belfasthills.org

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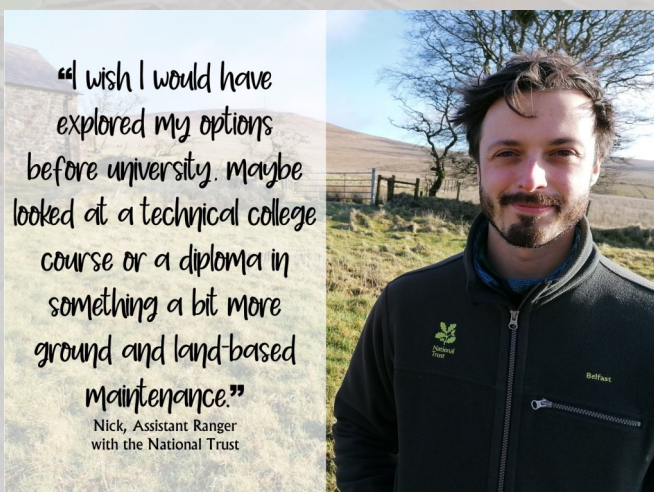
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RANGER

A ranger role is a predominantly practical job, where you will be in charge of managing the habitats on your site. This may involve planting trees, looking after meadows, pasture or wetland areas etc. You'll most likely have to work with volunteers and engage with the local community, perhaps by leading guided walks or delivering educational activities. Other tasks may include writing site reports, keeping records of habitats, species or volunteers, and maintaining tools and equipment.

Click the content below to view Nick, Assistant Ranger for the National Trust in Belfast, as he talks about his role and what helped him get to where he is today.



WOODLAND OFFICER

A woodland officer role is a mixture of practical hands on tasks and desk based work. Generally, you will be responsible for creating and potentially managing woodlands in your location. This usually involves partnership working and community engagement, as you work with local landowners to encourage and assist in woodland creation. You'll most likely have to work with volunteers and manage contractors who will be planting trees. Other tasks may include keeping records and producing reports as required, such as site surveys perhaps using GIS, planting and maintenance plans, budgets, and timescales etc.

Click the content below to view Jo, Woodland Officer for the Belfast Hills Partnership and the Woodland Trust, as she talks about her role and what helped her get to where she is today.



“Little did I know, volunteering would help me get that first step on the ladder to a career in conservation.”

Jo, Woodland Officer with
Belfast Hills Partnership & Woodland Trust



“My job's all about woodland creation and it's a really diverse role. One day I could be working with schools and community groups, the next day I'm working with private landowners, large NGO's and councils, planting up new areas of woodland right across the hills.”

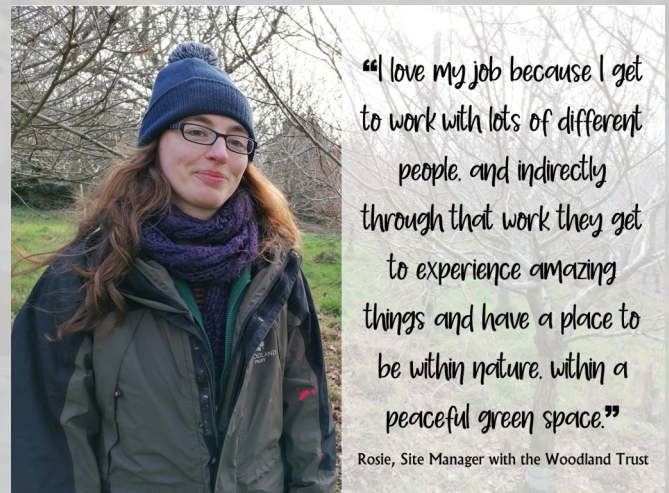
Jo, Woodland Officer with
Belfast Hills Partnership & Woodland Trust



SITE MANAGER

Any site manager role has a mixture of practical hands on tasks and desk based work. As the name suggests, you will be responsible for all tasks relating to the management of your site. This usually involves community engagement, as you respond to local queries; as well as working with volunteers and managing contractors to carry out practical work on the site i.e. habitat management like planting trees, clearing scrub, path maintenance, surveys, litter picks etc. Other tasks may include keeping records and producing reports as required, such as site surveys, planting and maintenance plans, budgets, and timescales.

Click the content below to view Rosie, Woodland Site Manager for the Woodland Trust, as she talks about her role and what helped her get to where she is today.



PROJECT ECOLOGIST

Ecologists carry out surveys on the natural world in order to assess how human activity and development is affecting different species and habitats. You will therefore need to have a good knowledge of plants and animals, as well as keeping up to date with environmental policies and legislation. The job involves a mixture of outdoor and desk-based work. As a project ecologist, you'll have to work closely with clients as you carry out surveys and write reports specific to their project. You will have to analyse and interpret your findings, perhaps using GPS and GIS techniques to produce maps and present results.

Click the content below to view Nathan, Project Ecologist with Tetra Tech as he talks about his role and what helped him get to where he is today.



"What got me to where I am now is a love of the environment and biodiversity. And because I love what I do, I think that makes it all easier."

Nathan, Project Ecologist with Tetra Tech



"As a Project Ecologist, my job involves a lot of field work but also some deskbased stuff. Primarily, I do a lot of wildlife surveys for protected and priority species throughout Northern Ireland."

Nathan, Project Ecologist with Tetra Tech



"When you're starting out, if you can get lots of knowledge and do as much training, and get involved with as many conservation organisations as you can... basically make yourself as employable as possible."

Nathan, Project Ecologist with Tetra Tech

BIODIVERSITY PROJECT OFFICER

A Project Officer will plan and coordinate the various activities relating to specific projects. Therefore, a Biodiversity Project Officer will manage the activities relating to specific biodiversity projects, like in the case of Judy below, who manages the Belfast Hills biodiversity projects. The role would involve a mixture of outdoor and desk-based work, and would be very seasonal in nature, as you plan your tasks dependent on the time of year species are present/most active. You will need to have a good knowledge of plants and animals, as well as keeping up to date on environmental policies and legislations. Outdoor tasks would include things like habitat creation and management, and wildlife surveys. You will also need to write reports and plans, and in some cases use techniques such as GPS and GIS.

Click the content below to view Judy, Hill Project Officer with the Belfast Hills Partnership as she talks about her role and what helped her get to where she is today.



"The best thing about my job, is the variety. Every day I'm doing something different, and every season it's different."

Judy, Projects Officer with
Belfast Hills Partnership



"It's a wonderful job because it's so practical and result based. It's not just writing dry reports."

Judy, Projects Officer with
Belfast Hills Partnership



"We have so many of our volunteers end up with jobs, because they've put the time in, because they've been really enthusiastic, and they've gone that extra mile."

Judy, Projects Officer with
Belfast Hills Partnership

ENVIRONMENTAL ENGAGEMENT OFFICER

An Environmental Engagement Officer will deliver sessions that actively involve the local community in the environment. This will include engaging local schools, youth groups, and recruiting volunteers, so the ability to communicate well is extremely important. There will usually be a mixture of practical conservation tasks and environmental education sessions, so you will require some good general knowledge on the natural world. You will also need to liaise with site managers/landowners to carry out any work they need done, as well as write reports and keep records.

Click the content below to view Laura, Environmental Engagement Officer with the Belfast Hills Partnership as she talks about her role and what helped her get to where she is today.



"I take groups of volunteers out in the hills and we undertake some practical conservation tasks, such as tree planting, litter lifts and woodland management."

Laura, Environmental Engagement Officer with Belfast Hills Partnership



"I would tell my younger self to worry less because I think you'll always just end up where you're supposed to be."

Laura, Environmental Engagement Officer with Belfast Hills Partnership



"The thing I enjoy most about my job, is making a positive difference to the local environment and the local community."

Laura, Environmental Engagement Officer with Belfast Hills Partnership



VOLUNTEER & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

A Volunteer & Skills Development Officer will work predominantly with the local community to provide volunteering opportunities in practical conservation, and training events to develop their skillset. The role would involve recruiting and retaining a good group of volunteers to carry out work in your area. As you will be working with a variety of people, the ability to communicate well is extremely important. The work would involve practical conservation tasks, but also event planning as you organise training sessions for your volunteers and the local community. You will also need to liaise with site managers/landowners to carry out any work they need done, as well as write reports and keep records.

Click the content below to view Lisa, Volunteer & Skills Development Officer with the Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership as she talks about her role and what helped her get to where she is today.



"We go out to various sites around Lough Neagh to help maintain the habitat and carry out conservation work"

Lisa, Volunteer & Skills Development Officer with Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership



"If your degree program offers a placement... take it!"

Lisa, Volunteer & Skills Development Officer with Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership



"Be enthusiastic and bring fresh ideas because that's how organisations move on and evolve, and you could be part of that."

Lisa, Volunteer & Skills Development Officer with Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

A Youth Development Officer in the environmental sector is responsible for creating and delivering environmental engagement sessions with young people. As a key part of their role is 'development', their aim is to upskill and empower young people to make an impact on their local environment, by providing training and opportunities for practical conservation. They help young people gain the skills and experience they need to improve the environment, gain employment in the environmental sector, or just help with their mental health & wellbeing. A Youth Development Officer will also need to recruit and retain young people in their project, build relationships with other youth work groups, and monitor project success by keeping records, gathering feedback and writing evaluation reports.

Click the content below to view Patricia, Youth Development Officer with the Belfast Hills Partnership as she talks about her role and what helped her get to where she is today.



"My aim is to empower young people to make an impact on their local environment through training and opportunities for practical conservation."

Patricia, Youth Development Officer with Belfast Hills Partnership



"I feel it was my experience in GIS, and also a voluntary placement I did, that really helped me start my environmental career."

Patricia, Youth Development Officer with Belfast Hills Partnership



"If I didn't volunteer, I never would have got the experience that I needed."

Patricia, Youth Development Officer with Belfast Hills Partnership



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROJECT OFFICER

A Project Officer will plan and coordinate the various activities relating to specific projects. Therefore, an Environmental Education Project Officer will manage the activities relating to specific environmental education projects, like in the case of

Dawn below, who is responsible for creating and delivering environmental engagement sessions with young people. The aim of the role is to upskill and empower young people to make an impact on their local environment, by providing training and opportunities for environmental campaigning, so the work can be extremely varied. You will also need to recruit and retain young people in your project, build relationships with other youth work groups, and monitor project success by keeping records, gathering feedback, and writing evaluation reports.

Click the content below to view Dawn, Project Officer with the Ulster Wildlife as she talks about her role and what helped her get to where she is today.



ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGNER

Environmental Campaigners care deeply for the natural world, and actively work towards protecting it from destruction or pollution. The role wouldn't necessarily be paid unless you work for a bigger environmental campaigning organisation. You need to be well informed on your topic in order to encourage others to join you and to withstand the opposition. You'll need to work closely with the community, and keep up to date with environmental legislation and policy. Good communication and planning skills are important, as you'll need to think about your key messages, recruit and retain volunteers and organise events.

Click the content below to view Cormac, Chair of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign as he talks about his role and what helped him get to where he is today.



"If you create an upwelling of public concerns about the environment, you will eventually get to the people who are the decision makers... And this is where you need campaigning."
Cormac, Chair of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign



"Young people... forget about the old fogies! Get out there and form your own conservation groups!"
Cormac, Chair of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign



"Gainful employment in the environmental sector, will create a generation of young people who are devoting their energies and their time to the environment, rather than having it as a hobby or a spare time interest... we need to get that energy and enthusiasm."
Cormac, Chair of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign

ENVIRONMENTAL CAREER FAQs

The following are questions sent in to us by our social media followers, that we did our best to answer during the Environmental Careers Festival week.

HOW DO YOU FIND OUT ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES?

If you're looking for volunteering opportunities in Northern Ireland, a good place to start is with the **Volunteer Now** website, who promote and support volunteering across NI.

Another useful website is the **Northern Ireland Environment Link** who are a networking organisation for all the environmental groups in NI. As well as a useful resource for finding out about the different environmental groups, they also share news and promote events.

In the Belfast Hills Partnership, we have lots of different ways people can get involved in our work. We run a variety of volunteer groups on different days of the week, to ensure there's something for everyone no matter what your availability is like. No experience is necessary as the task leader will go over what needs to be done and how to do it at the start of each task. We tend to meet on site and the location varies across the Belfast Hills, but we will always provide enough notice as to its whereabouts and a map. If you'd like more information or you'd like to be added to our volunteering mailing list, just contact Laura, our Volunteer Officer **laura.shiels@belfasthills.org**

HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE, ON TOP OF A DEGREE, IS EXPECTED FOR AN ENTRY LEVEL JOB IN THE SECTOR?

It depends on the role and the organisation your applying for, but it's usually about a year's worth of experience for an entry level role. But remember that doesn't necessarily need to be paid experience, unless they say otherwise, volunteering counts too.

ENVIRONMENTAL CAREER FAQs

WHAT SECTOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT, IN YOUR OPINION, GIVES THE BEST SALARY?

The corporate side of the environmental sector is probably the best paid, such as working for environmental consultancies, industry or doing GIS work for example. But generally, you don't start getting the best salaries until you work your way up. When you first start out the pay isn't that great in most jobs, but in these cases the actual work you are doing makes up for it because you get to do more of the practical hands on activities. As you work your way up, the pay gets better, but you find yourself in the office more, managing staff and putting out tenders or chasing work. So pros and cons to everything.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO GET AN ENVIRONMENTAL JOB WITHOUT A CAR/DRIVING LICENCE?

Yes technically it is possible to get an environmental job without a car/driving licence, but it depends on the type of environmental work you are looking for. If it's based in a big city, or if it's more of an indoor environmental job like GIS/mapping or planning/policy work, they may not have driving licence down as an essential criteria in the job description. But if you're hoping for a more practical conservation job, where you are looking after habitats – generally this work takes place out of cities, where you will be required to drive in order to carry out your day to day tasks. Therefore, a driving licence will be essential.

Sometimes it is just the driving licence an organisation will require, not necessarily access to a car – I know when people are just starting out on their careers, affording a car is not always possible. But at least if you have a driving licence, you would be able to drive organisation owned vehicles (if they have them).

ENVIRONMENTAL CAREER FAQs

WHAT QUALIFICATIONS ARE NEEDED FOR RANGER JOBS?

It's hard to say exactly what qualifications are needed for Ranger jobs, as it depends on the landscape the Ranger job is based and also the organisation you're working for. Generally, any qualification in practical land management is useful, such as those offered by Lantra. Things like strimmer and chainsaw licences for example, or the use of herbicides/pesticides etc. Also, a driving licence is pretty essential and I've seen Ranger roles recently that have also required trailer licences too. In addition to that, practical experience on the ground is always a big plus, and it doesn't have to be paid experience, unless they say otherwise, volunteering counts too.

WHAT ADVICE OR CAREER OPTIONS ARE OUT THERE FOR PEOPLE WITH NO QUALIFICATIONS? I WOULD BE OPEN TO LOTS OF DIFFERENT JOBS.

Environmental jobs and organisations are so varied, that it also means their role requirements are varied too. Some roles would expect a degree level qualification, but others would ask for practical experience. Finding out which means checking job adverts and looking closely at the essential and desirable criteria. Having no formal qualifications does not rule you out, as long as you have practical experience. Even people with qualifications would still need experience as well. If you want to build your experience, remember that it doesn't necessarily need to be paid experience, unless they say otherwise, volunteering counts too, which could be fitted around current commitments, and is a useful way to build up your CV.

ENVIRONMENTAL CAREER FAQs

DO YOU NEED A DEGREE LEVEL QUALIFICATION TO BECOME A PROJECT ECOLOGIST?

It depends on the organisation, but generally yes, a Project Ecologist is a role that would usually require a degree level qualification.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO GET A LIST OF QUALIFICATIONS NEEDED TO WORK IN THE CONSERVATION SECTOR IN GENERAL?

It depends what kind of conservation work you're hoping to get into. The sector is quite varied - from the practical conservation jobs, where you're actually on site doing the hands-on management of the habitats, but you've also got surveying jobs, where you find out what wildlife is present on site and monitor its progress. Then you've got the environmental education side of things, where you're working with young people or leading walks. Then there's more of the indoor environmental roles, where you could be handling wildlife data and mapping, or planning and policy work. Not to mention those jobs in environmental campaigning as well. And some jobs combine many of the above elements. So in terms of qualifications, it's hard to say exactly what qualifications are needed, as it depends on the role, the landscape you'd be working in and also the organisation you're working for. Generally, for practical habitat management jobs any qualifications in practical land management is useful, such as those offered by [Lantra](#). A driving licence is pretty essential too.

In addition to that, practical experience on the ground is always a big plus. Volunteering might be an option if you're wanting to increase your experience or try out different roles to find one you like. Building up your knowledge on species identification would also be useful, the [Centre for Environmental Data and Recording \(CEDaR\)](#) has lots of online resources and sometimes deliver training too.

TIPS ON APPLYING FOR JOBS

FILLING IN JOB APPLICATIONS

Essential/Desirable Criteria:

The essential criteria are elements you **MUST** have. There is absolutely no point in filling out the job application if you don't meet **ALL** of the essential criteria.

The desirable criteria are things that employers would like you to have if possible, but if you don't have them, it's not the end of the world, you may still get considered.

Guidance notes:

Often with a job application pack, it will include guidance notes on how to fill the application form out. Make sure you read the guidance notes carefully, and do exactly what they say. Failure to do these simple things, generally means your application form won't even be considered. For example, often the guidance notes will say '*Complete all sections. Failure to complete all sections, will result in your application form not being considered*'. But despite this, many people don't bother filling in the section about their GCSE's, because they think well I've got a degree, it's no longer relevant. But a common essential criteria is often '*5 GCSE passes including Maths & English*', and so by not filling out that small section, a candidate is kicked out of the process.

Filling in the form with the reader in mind:

Think about font size, grammar and spelling. Remember that your application form is the first impression you will give the interview panel, and it gives them an initial idea of the standard of work they will expect from you. So, if you can't be bothered to spell check your application, you are very unlikely to spell check important reports or emails when you work for them, and it may make them think this is not the candidate they want to employ.

Providing evidence:

You will need to provide evidence of how you meet each of the criteria in the job description. For example, if the criteria asks for experience in carrying out wildlife surveys, you must state examples of how you meet this. You need to go into the detail of when you did this, how you did this, maybe even talking about the techniques you used to really emphasise the point.

TIPS ON APPLYING FOR JOBS

PREDICTING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Employers need to check that you meet the criteria set out in the job description. Therefore, they often tailor their interview questions to the essential and desirable criteria, scoring your answers on each. A good exercise when you're preparing for an interview, is to go through each of the criteria and think about a possible question relating to it, as well as some good examples demonstrating your relevant experience. This will help you get in the right mindset of possible questions.

DURING INTERVIEWS

Looking the part:

Interviews are a formal process. It's not essential to wear a suit, however looking smart and really making it obvious that you have made an effort, creates a good first impression. You will be representing this company at meetings and events etc, they want to know you will make the right impression on its partners, members of the public, and all the people that you'll be coming into contact with etc.

Preparation is key:

Employers can tell the difference between people who have prepared for interview and those who are just winging it. Read as much as you can about the company to enable you to apply your experience with the ethos, priorities and areas of work to that of the company. If it can be weaved into your answers it will impress the panel.

Understanding the question:

Employers know the interview process is a nerve-wracking one, so it's ok to occasionally ask to have an interview question repeated, or to ask for clarification such as "do you mean..."

Be ready for anything:

Stay light on your feet – you will be asked questions you didn't anticipate, just don't let that fluster you. Never say the words – I have no experience of doing that, think of connected/related experiences, as if it is an essential criteria you have eliminated yourself from the process no matter how good an interview you have done.

TIPS ON APPLYING FOR JOBS

DURING INTERVIEWS (CONT)

Be likeable:

Remember a job interview is a formal process, so you need to treat it as such and not be over familiar or jokey with the panel. However, try to be enthusiastic, engaging and open. The panel should have no doubt that you want the job. If you don't look enthusiastic in the interview process, you're not likely to be enthusiastic for long on the job.

Ask questions:

Ask intelligent questions about the company, what the team is like to work for, opportunities to apply for funding to enhance the project or drill down further into what exactly the job will entail. Just make sure that you don't ask questions that are already answered in the job pack or their website – it makes it look like you haven't done your homework. Always take the opportunity to ask questions at the end, but please don't waste it on "when will I hear from you?" you know that employers will get in touch with you if you are successful, and you asking when that will happen, won't make it happen any quicker. So don't waste the opportunity of asking questions on that.

Environmental Employability Workshop:

Watch a recording of our online workshop to learn more from a panel of experts about filling in application forms, undertaking interviews, predicting interview questions and getting the experience you need to land your first job.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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