
Downloaded from: http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/4847/

Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria’s institutional repository ‘Insight’ must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria’s institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available here) for educational and not-for-profit activities provided that

• the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
  • a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
  • the content is not changed in any way
  • all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

You may not

• sell any part of an item
• refer to any part of an item without citation
• amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator’s reputation
• remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found here.
Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing insight@cumbria.ac.uk.
Every sandwich needs a filling

As part of this month’s focus on education, Dr Andrew Weatherall of the National School of Forestry, University of Cumbria, considers the importance of good placement opportunities for ‘sandwich’ year students.

Current students completing second year now are struggling to find placements (only five out of 13 have found places). Others will find them, but in my opinion, it is late and stressful for students to be looking for placements as the academic year ends. So, although we can provide the academic skills (the bread) they expect, reinforced by our practical focus (at least one third of our courses are delivered in the woods), I am concerned that we may need to transfer some of these new students to the straight-through version before the end of their course because placements (the filling) cannot be found.

The National School of Forestry does not expect to offer students automatic sandwich placement positions. It is correct that placements should be competitive and awarded on merit. It is also fair that our students compete not only with other forestry students, but also with students on arboriculture, ecology, environmental, conservation and geography courses, and even from less obviously related courses. However, we do not wish to adopt the practice of providing unpaid internships, which is unfortunately so prevalent in the conservation sector. This practice is criticised when financial and legal firms do it in the city. It should be equally unacceptable in the rural sector. This is one reason why our Woodland Ecology and Conservation programme has a strong forestry core and students and recent graduates have the skills to get placements and jobs with Scottish Forestry, Scottish Woodlands, Tihill Forestry and others.

Despite the financial challenges, I would like the forestry and woodland sector to consider these benefits that providing placements can give:

1. YEAR-LONG JOB INTERVIEW

Some of our current placement providers only offer placements in years when they are considering expanding their workforce. The placement selection is similar to a permanent job interview, but the year is, essentially, a probationary period with an easy release for both parties at the end.

2. JOB SATISFACTION

Every professional forester I have met is passionate about their career and keen to encourage the next generation to join and develop. This is a practical way to contribute. Our students are like sponges, so keen to learn, especially by doing, rather than sitting in lecture rooms listening to me.

3. RETURNING THE FAVOUR

Anyone reading this who benefitted from a sandwich placement year themselves (as I did) should think carefully about whether they are now at a point in their career where they can give others a similar opportunity. Anyone who had a frustrating placement year (it happens sometimes) might wish to show that they can provide a better one.

4. GOOD STUDENTS

Once individuals and organisations start providing placements, we find that they tend to keep doing so. Our students are not perfect—they have much to learn, often about working habits as much as forestry knowledge—but over a year they are capable of giving a net benefit to the placement provider.

5. UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

The sandwich placement year is a module. Students have to keep a work diary or a blog, they have to do a technical report (which should be on something beneficial to the provider). They may also start their dissertation data collection (so potentially do a larger piece of useful research).

Providing an opportunity for a year can be daunting, but we are interested in creating portfolio placements where two or three employers in one location (so the student can rent accommodation for the year) might offer a combined opportunity. This could give a fantastic insight into the forest products supply chain. This article is from my perspective as a lecturer in the National School of Forestry and does not necessarily reflect the feelings of my colleagues. I have not consulted with staff at other institutions, although recent social media posts suggest more placement opportunities are needed, to the benefit all students studying forestry courses. I do know that if more students did get placements from our courses and then progressed on to graduate employment, we would all use this in our marketing to attract more students to our courses. Thus, providing placement opportunities is to the benefit of us all – students, higher education providers and the wider forestry industry.