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FUTURE FORESTERS SKILLS DAY 2019

Dr John Jackson reports from the Future Foresters Skills Day 2019, recently held at Shuttleworth College in Bedfordshire, where industry and the next generation of foresters convened with the goal of addressing the skills gap in the forestry, arboriculture and countryside sectors.



AS the UK's leading forestry education charity, the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) is concerned about whether enough younger folk are embarking on a career to do with managing trees. It has taken a number of steps to raise the profile of forestry and arboriculture through measures such as its Future Foresters scheme. This second national conference followed on from the successful pioneer event at Moulton College in 2017.

This year's theme was 'Addressing skills gaps in the forestry, arboriculture and countryside sectors', which built on the recently published *Forestry Skills Plan 2019-2024* compiled by the Forestry Skills Forum, a broad consortium of UK organisations with a common interest in ensuring that enough young people enter the industry (and with the right qualifications).

As the UK's main forestry education charity, the RFS coordinated publication of that landmark document. If you have not flicked through that yet, please do so - go to the RFS website (www.rfs.org.uk) to remind yourself why it is vital to nourish fresh entries into forestry and related activities.

Set within the stunning location of Old Warden Park in Bedfordshire, Shuttleworth College offers a wide variety of full-time and part-time courses, making good use of the wide range of natural resources available, which includes parkland, farmland, lakes and woods.

The college first opened its doors to agriculture students in 1946, at the

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Tree Health & Biosecurity

Report pests and diseases on TreeAlert, urges Becki Gawthorpe.

Old Warden Park Mansion House. It is badged by City & Guilds/NPTC, Lantra, the RHS, and the RFS itself. Nearby is the internationally acclaimed Shuttleworth Collection, a world-famous aeronautical and automotive museum located at the Old Warden Aerodrome.

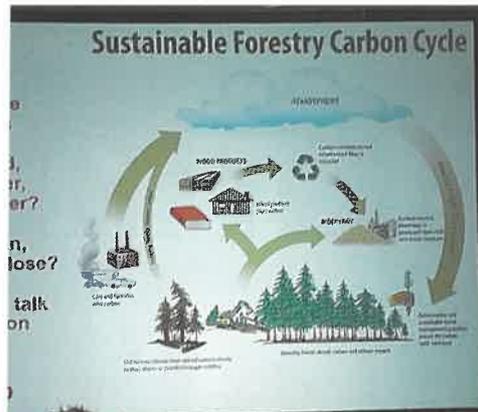
The full title was the 2nd National Forestry, Arboriculture and Countryside Student Conference and Demo Day. It was billed as the perfect opportunity to find out what skills are needed for a successful career in the Forestry, Arboriculture and Countryside Management sector - and so it proved.

The day was aimed at full-time, part-time and recent students, and early career professionals. Approaching 200 delegates arrived in a flotilla of college mini-buses and a pair of coaches from right across England

and Wales.

After a welcome and introductions from the RFS Future Foresters officer, Adam Pickles; conference chair, RFS CEO Simon Lloyd; and partner and host, Catherine Lloyd, director of land-based studies, Shuttleworth College, we heard from four excellent speakers, each of whom gave delegates the benefit of their extensive industry experience, condensed into 20-minute slots in the morning session. They were Dr Robin Jackson, industry manager, City & Guilds; Euan Brierley, associate forestry consultant, WSP; Tom Williams, managing director, Maydencroft; and Becki Gawthorpe, biosecurity officer, Forestry Commission.

Dr Jackson, an experienced further education teacher and manager, has an in-depth knowledge of land-based training.



Far left: Virtual chainsawing from Stihl inside the marquee.

Left above: Dr Euan Brierley on the hot topic of heat islands.

Left below: Adam Sharman of Moulton College accepts the Haglöf prize.

After explaining what his organisation is, he turned to the skills gaps identified by employers in the land use sector both now and for the foreseeable future, as training provision needs to always plan ahead.

A national survey of employers revealed a yawning skills gap in the land-based industries which needs bridging as new technology moves on apace. Employers were confident, though, that they would be taking on more staff in the near future.

Solutions to these challenges ranged from improving links between education and the tree industry, making employers better aware of what is on offer, attracting school leavers and CPD. Vital assets were soft skills, keeping current, developing contacts, being flexible and being prepared for

openings that do not yet exist.

Tom Williams offered an employer's perspective. Employers may struggle to recruit because candidates do not have the skills set they are after and show a lack of commitment and diversity in a male-dominated activity. There is often a dearth of hands-on skills, management experience and team working ethos too.

To maximise chances of getting shortlisted, past work experience is a definite plus, even if not related to the post – especially if it demonstrates flexibility and up-skills. Possible jobs are not always advertised, so do call around.

CVs should be two A4 sides maximum, in a simple format, show past employment, have a sensible email address, be tailored to

the company you are submitting to and be laced with buzz words. Follow up a few days later with a polite phone call.

At interview, turn up a few minutes early; display enthusiasm, energy and eagerness; be presentable; show genuine interest in the company; be pro-active; and sell yourself. Take along your certificates and diplomas.

And in your first day in the job, be prompt and presentable, ask questions, show mutual respect, be professional, turn off your mobile, be positive, enquire about H&S and above all, enjoy it.

Euan Brierley is a chartered forester who has managed from small farm woodlands up to pension scheme-sized forestry holdings. Euan is the former chair of the ICF Education Committee. He used his own

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career experiences to pass on lessons learnt and did a bit of crystal-ball-gazing on the future hot topics in forestry.

On that, the emphasis has switched from producing timber to carbon as an overarching theme. Trees have a new usage and forestry and tree care is becoming recognised as part of the far wider management of natural resources such as carbon sequestration, whole catchments, biodiversity and quality of life.

He split a career into three phases:

- Early Career – when it was crucial to grasp the organisation's role, gain basic technical skills, forge links and relationships and amass professional development.

- The Colleague Stage – when you should develop your own identity or specialism, be effective and efficient, make independent contributions, join a professional body and expand your know-how.

- Advisory Stage – follows with broad experience, leadership in a professional organisation, coaching and mentoring and job enrichment.

CPD was vital too by nurturing a speciality, sitting on committees, joining professional bodies, sharing information and writing newsletters and blogs.

Our trees, woodlands and forests are vital economic, environmental and social assets, but they are under an increasing threat from the introduction and spread of harmful tree pests and diseases. Human activity is a key factor in their spread. We have the ability to move pests and diseases around much further and faster than they can on their own.

Becki Gawthorpe leads the Forestry Commission's 'Keep It Clean' campaign. There are four commitments that future foresters and arborists can make to help halt the arrival and spread of pests and diseases:

- carrying out routine biosecurity control measures, such as regularly cleaning clothing, PPE, tools, equipment and vehicles;
- keeping up to date with tree health legislation that might impact your work;
- sourcing planting stock from a reputable supplier;
- managing tree populations to increase species and genetic diversity.

Becki highlighted the escalating roll-call of exotic P & Ds arriving uninvited in the UK since the early 2000s and outlined the case histories of *Phytophthora ramorum*, oak processionary moth, ash dieback, Asian long-horned beetle and stain in London planes, before turning to the potential advent of the emerald ash borer and *Xylella*. More information and digital learning courses on biosecurity are available on the FC website.

After lunch, the foresters of the future migrated into the surrounding parkland to visit stands and see demonstrations by high-profile industry players, offering delegates the opportunity to get hands-on with kit, ask



Above: Shuttleworth College in Old Warden Park.



Left: Entries in the photo competition.



Left below: Inside the crowded exhibits marquee.

questions and network.

In the marquee or outside was a veritable 'who's who' of the forestry world. No less than 26 companies, drawn from across the UK and France, Germany and Sweden, displayed their wares or services.

As a tempting bonus there was the chance for a college or university to win £2,700 worth of Haglöf of Sweden measurement kit – a Haglöf Vertex Laser Geo – by entering an RFS photography competition for the best image capturing the essence of the application of skills or learning in a woodland environment. The winner was Moulton College in Northamptonshire.

Forestry and tree care are always evolving but never so rapidly as nowadays. The industry is becoming more and more technology and innovation led – from the way we plan, plant and manage our forests

and woodlands to the way we harvest and market our timber.

The technology on display was not a new-fangled range of unnecessary contraptions or boys' toys but a vision for the future.

Tomorrow's foresters must possess the skills to work with state-of-the-art robotics, GIS, GPS, drones, advanced cab and harvesting technologies, and be able to plan with confidence in a world where environmental change, pests and diseases and societal demands are impacting on the tree species we used to be able to rely on and the services they offer society.

The day proved a magnet for educational providers nationwide including the Scottish School of Forestry, Bangor University and the National School of Forestry, who judged it well worth making the trip to Bedfordshire to market their courses to the delegates.