



HANNAH BRANWOOD INTERVIEW

Natural Capital Hub Project Officer

SUMMARY: Hannah Branwood is an LJMU BSc Wildlife Conservation graduate and is currently completing an MPhil in Conservation Ecology.

Hannah is a Project Officer and Trainer within LJMU's Natural Capital Hub. Her role involves coordinating and managing a training programme with the aim of embedding a natural capital approach into policy and decision making. Hannah believes that skills such as carbon literacy and an awareness of contemporary issues/legislation surrounding the environment are crucial for graduates looking to getting a job in the Green Sector. She also stresses the importance of volunteering and networking as the Green Sector is often competitive.

IP: So, Hannah, if you could tell us what job role you are currently in and what your main tasks consist of?

HB: I work for the Natural Capital Hub at LJMU. It is a knowledge exchange and research hub within the university. We map the natural capital assets across country all over England. They do it for different clients and they show the opportunities or the provide evidence for different habitat creation or improvement projects. My side of the hub is to do with the training. We do training with local authority planners to upskill them. Another part is the outreach side where we go to schools and get them engaged with the environmental sector and introduce ideas to create a pipeline of skills going into the universities. I have also been working with the employability team to try and get our partners to collaborate on different internships schemes.

IP: What about your education pathway? What made you go into your degree, and did you always know you wanted to do it?

HB: I did a Wildlife Conservation undergraduate degree, but it was a bit of a snap decision. I didn't know if I wanted to go to university, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I took a year out after sixth form and just started looking for courses. I think in sixth form, the only things you really know about are biology and geography, the core courses. I didn't want to carry on any of my A-Levels. Biology I liked a little bit, and I did my project on the conservation of Tasmanian Devils. So, I liked that, and I liked nature. I used to always watch David Attenborough documentaries and things, I knew it was something I would enjoy and that's why I did Wildlife Conservation.

IP: What skills did you gain from your degree? Did it help you decide what you wanted to do afterwards or influence your career pathway?

HB: I thought I would want to do something with animals, but by the end of the year I think I was one of the only ones who had a focus toward plants. The skills that were really useful were technical skills like surveying. Also, the communication skills I developed as well, activities such as doing presentations helped and my writing skills drastically improved. Critical thinking and research skills were also a big part of my degree. I knew I wanted to continue with this field, but I didn't know whether that would be in academia or a project elsewhere. Then I got an opportunity at the end of

my degree to do this Masters, which is in Conservation Ecology. It was too good of an opportunity to pass up at the end of the degree.

With my career pathway, I originally imagined I would be outside doing something quite practical. I thought it would definitely be something conservation related, but that's quite a competitive field. I did, however, like the research and writing side of things, the outreach stuff in particular. I am lucky that my job now incorporates all the things that I particularly enjoy.

IP: Did you do any work experience or volunteering during your degree?

HB: So, I worked at Clarkes my whole degree. It was not related to my interests, but it was certainly one of the most important things at that age for improving my confidence, as well as doing things like meeting targets and speaking with customers. I started to do volunteer work within university such as surveying LJMU grounds. I then joined a project called Gems in the Dunes which was looking at practical management and surveying on Sefton Coast. More recently, the most relevant experience that I have got is I joined a volunteer position at Youth For Nature, we did loads within that organisation, developing it from a few people over Covid to a proper brand. On the research side of things, I did research assistant work for one of my supervisors, doing a bit of everything and helping out in labs.

IP: Were you taught about the Green Sector and transferable skills during your degree?

HB: I definitely didn't have much awareness of the Green Sector. It was biological sciences that did our module on careers, and so someone came to talk to us about the NHS but nothing about the Green Sector really. I also wasn't aware of transferable skills; I am only just now realising how valuable these skills are. We did have lots of emails about different internships, but I guess I didn't realise how valuable they would be, and because I was working part-time if they weren't paid then I would not have time to do them. That's why I think the discovery internships now are good because they offer paid experiences to students. The Natural Capital Hub were working to try and boost the partnerships and employers from green sectors offering those jobs. I think the university are really trying to improve it at the minute. It's just giving the students insight into that sector and what it's like in the working world. I think that the importance of Carbon Literacy now and in the future needs to be integrated into more modules. I think at all ages they're looking to green the curriculum, but it needs to be as soon as possible.

IP: What skills do you think are needed in the sector now? Do you have any advice for students and graduates thinking of going into the Green Sector?

HB: Carbon literacy training, an understanding of contemporary issues, and keeping up with legislation are essential. There are different ways to keep up to date with information, you can sign up for notifications from Natural England and places like that on social media. I find the news can be particularly negative and so I find it beneficial to keep up to date through social media and follow organisations on LinkedIn to view their posts and articles. Building a network through LinkedIn can also help because more people will post things you are interested in. Try and get your voice out there a little bit with blogs or LinkedIn posts to talk about what skills you're building and any point of views you have on current affairs. Social media now is a really good tool.

I think the main transferable skills needed are written and verbal communication, I find myself writing a lot of reports. Critical thinking too. The confidence is a huge one for me, knowing how to email and approach people and network, it's so important to build relationships in this sector. Another important thing to do is to get outside and connect with nature. It helps you to appreciate

the earth and look at why you are doing this and why there is a need for this urgent action. Grab opportunities for learning, extra courses, and seminars. Anything that provides evidence of the skills you have is worthwhile. Definitely volunteering, especially for younger people now there's lots of roles available because they want younger voices. Reach out to people, ask questions about job roles you're interested in and maybe seek out a mentor in the sector.