

Meet a... Environmental Management Graduate Trainee



Pearl Costello, Environmental Management Graduate Trainee at Royal Agricultural University

What does an average day look like?

I normally start the day by grabbing a cup of tea at 8.30 and reading and replying to emails for about 15 minutes. After this there doesn't seem to be an 'average day' as such, as my role is so diverse. Some days will be full of meetings with various people and departments across the University, such as Estates, Laboratories, Catering, SU, or Marketing; or spent doing mini audits of the campus or behaviour change/awareness events. Other days are largely desk based, writing or updating strategies, drafting press releases or reviewing environmental legislation.

What are the key skills and qualifications required for your job?

I was required to have an undergraduate degree (2:1 or above) in a relevant field, although I had actually just graduated with a BSc in Marine Biology and Coastal Ecology (1st), so the type of degree needed may be broader than people expect. Since beginning the role I've attended internal auditor and sustainable procurement training, but most of the training has been on the job and research based.

What training and continuous professional development do you require?

The internal auditor training was really useful in helping me understand more about ISO14001, as well as the important skills for being an internal auditor. I'm also undertaking a part-time MSc in Environmental Design of Buildings as I'm very interested in the estates and construction side of things.

What are your top three responsibilities?

- Leading the University's Environmental Management System development.
- Co-ordinating environmental communications and awareness campaigns across the University.
- Developing and monitoring strategies and objectives and targets for improving environmental performance.

Tell us something surprising about your job that people may not know about?

This is probably not the case with EAUC members, but a lot of people seem to be surprised that my job is not only to do with recycling and waste!

What are the positives and negatives of the job?

I think the best parts of the job is being able to use my initiative, being able to work and interact with all sorts of people across the University and the feeling of accomplishment that the work I'm doing is making a difference. As it's a small



To help our Members understand more about the roles in further and higher education institutions, we've created a suite of career profiles. These share the main responsibilities and skills and knowledge required of many of the key roles that play a part in embedding sustainability in a tertiary education institution.

View the entire suite at www.eauc.org.uk/meet_a_member

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institution I'm the only environmental officer, so it's not always possible to get another perspective on a project or initiative.

Do you manage a budget, and what are your key priorities for this?

The budget I have use of is mainly used for consultancy, training and auditor fees. I try to prioritise training for staff across the University, which I think is key for the success of the system. I also use some money for marketing/internal campaign materials such as posters or pop-ups.

What does the path to career progression in this role look like?

With the experience the graduate scheme has offered, in combination with the MSc I'm undertaking, there are a range of career opportunities. For example, I have the skills to continue working within the Higher or Further Education sector, at a higher level or at a larger institution; or to look at similar environmental management roles in other sectors e.g. councils or private businesses. After developing a full Environmental Management System from beginning to end, it would also be possible to think about becoming a consultant.

What is the minimum and maximum salary band for this role?

The salary can be quite variable for this type of role, depending on candidate experience and the size of an institution. For a recent graduate and excluding sponsorship for further study, the salary would likely be £15,000 – £22,000.

What advice do you have for graduates and other potential candidates who are considering joining?

Consider the training and personal development opportunities available with each job – having the ability to work independently by co-ordinating your own project is invaluable for future employment.

For institutions without an Environmental Management Graduate Trainee – what 3 aspects of your role do you think are the most important for any institution's sustainability journey?

I think that simply having somebody to bring together and communicate all the cross-departmental work being done is crucial. There was already a huge amount of work being done at RAU before I joined, but having a dedicated staff member allowed us to showcase our environmental performance as well as to continue to improve it.

In addition to the communication and marketing aspect, I feel the other important parts of the role are the development of strategies and action plans and the co-ordination of behaviour change initiatives. These can have enormous benefits in many areas – such as student recruitment, staff performance and satisfaction and legal compliance.

What department do you and your line manager sit in? Which departmental interactions are vital for your role?

My line manager and I sit in the Management Information Services (MIS) department, as some of the work I do fits in with the HESA Estates Management Record return (part of MIS deals with all the various HESA Returns). However I have to work with almost every other department! I probably work most closely with the Estates department and have regular meetings with our Director of Estates; but I also work with the academic schools, commercial services, marketing and many others.

What opportunities and challenges does working in a higher education institution bring?

Both the biggest opportunity and challenge is the fact that you have new students coming in each year. Unlike sectors with low turnovers, where sustainability staff could only need to work hard in order to raise awareness amongst staff in the initial stages, awareness and behaviour change campaigns need to be continually in place in universities, to educate new students. However, this also means that there is a huge range of new people who can get involved with the agenda and contribute in many unique ways.

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How has EAUC Membership helped you in your job and within your institution?

EAUC Membership has been enormously helpful in this job role – from facilitating networking and sharing of best practice amongst the sector, to providing legal updates and technical knowledge in specialist areas. I regularly use the mailing list, the sustainability exchange and I thoroughly enjoyed the EAUC Annual Conference 2014.

How can other Members contact you?

- Email: pearl.costello@rau.ac.uk
- Website: www.rau.ac.uk/sustainability

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