

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT WITH MODERN APPRENTICES

Oldham Council turns young blood into home grown talent

On the job training can provide young people with vital skills and experience to get ahead in their field and in the case of Countryside Ranger Heath Charnock, out in the fields was exactly where he needed to be.

Oldham Council runs a number of Modern Apprentice schemes across the organisation, but believes it is the first to have put an apprentice through training to emerge as a fully-fledged Estate Ranger at the age of 21.

HOMEGROWN TALENT

When he was just 19, Heath Charnock began work based at Oldham's Strinesdale Countryside Centre. A day release student at Manchester's City College completing a National Vocational Qualification level 3, Heath spent minimal time in the classroom but vital time becoming part of Oldham's team of Countryside Rangers.

After leaving school with a firm commitment to taking up a career in the outdoors, Heath studied for an NVQ level 2 in Environmental Conservation followed by a BTEC in Countryside Management from the University of Huddersfield.

By the time he spotted the Council's advertisement for a Countryside Ranger Modern Apprentice in the local press, he was already more qualified than many his age.

The basis for NVQ certificates is vocational, requiring students to gather on the job evidence to meet a series of tough criteria.

In Heath's case, this meant taking on aspects of the job that he would not normally have been expected to cover and in some cases acting in a managerial role.

'YOU'VE GOT THE JOB!'

"Because I had already done the NVQ level 2 I was taken on at Oldham ready to start level 3. But I quickly realised there's a huge leap between level 2 and 3 and both myself and my manager had to work really hard to cover everything I was being asked to study," says Heath.

"It meant setting up management plans, carrying out risk assessments and working with groups like the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and supervising their voluntary work, providing the necessary equipment and making sure everyone is safe".

"But while it has been hard work, there is so much advantage to getting on the job experience, over somebody who has only had the opportunity to study while sat in a classroom."

Evidence gathering for Heath's course included:

- Implementing environmental good practice at work
- Working with community groups
- Organising environmental projects
- Preparing and delivering educational activities
- Promoting, monitoring and maintaining health, safety and security
- Developing personal performance and maintaining working relationships
- Motivating and recognising voluntary effort
- Organising and leading the work of volunteers

EMPLOYER'S VIEW

Support staff from the Council's Environmental Services section worked hard to find a college that provided the right course for Heath at his advanced level and funding was successfully sought from the Learning Skills Council.

Principal Countryside Officer at Oldham Eirwen Hopwood says: "We didn't realise when we took Heath on quite the broad range of work he would need to cover. It really was a learning curve for everyone involved to allow Heath to get the experience in all the areas he needed for his qualification."

But the experience has been positive all around. Eirwen adds: "It's wonderful being able to open up these opportunities for a young person and see them grow under your guidance and emerge fully qualified."

"We'll definitely be advertising for another Modern Apprentice in the future. We believe we're the first local authority to employ a Modern Apprentice as a Ranger, and we believe Heath to be the youngest Estate Ranger at his level because of this."

Eirwen Hopwood
Principal Countryside Officer
Oldham Council

eirwen.hopwood@oldham.gov.uk