



A FOCUS ON NATURE CAREERS HUB

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT OFFICER

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PREVIOUSLY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, RSPB

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is your role, and how long have you been doing it?

I was a Youth Development Manager for the RSPB for more than 2 and half years. I was responsible for leading the RSPB's youth work, primarily with those aged 16-24. It was all about baking youth participation into the organization; involving young people in decision-making, championing the role they play, amplifying their voices and using the resources and tools we have to empower them further.

What are your main responsibilities?

The main bulk of my responsibilities included: supporting youth initiatives and young people (such as through financial support, giving advice, access to communications channels, and opening up platforms); developing partnerships with organisations to reach our youth objectives; and developing best practice tools on youth participation and training & supporting colleagues to deliver youth work. I was also in charge of recruiting and managing the brilliant RSPB Youth Council, running various youth events and activities and driving a cultural change in the way we did youth participation at RSPB.

Who are the main people you have to work with?

Young people – it's essential that I made the time to listen and meet a variety of young people. Youth participation is relevant to any area of the business, so I could potentially be working with anyone – however, key teams included: Community Empowerment, Campaigning, Volunteering, HR, Communications, and Brand. It also involved working together with other environmental NGOs and

youth organisations – this collaboration between groups is critical and more impactful, so partnerships are a key component.

What does your day-to-day look like?

Each day is different, but it was sure to include some meetings - either meeting with young people to hear their ideas, supporting a colleague on youth work and advising them, or meeting a partner to share what we're up to and learn from each other. It likely involved planning around future events and activities, ensuring I was on top of any risks and issues and managing the schedule, completing any tasks that need to be done. And perhaps working on any tools and resources that I was creating. If there was ever a safeguarding issue or concern, then that always took priority.

Emily and RSPB staff at the Youth Global Climate Strike in 2019



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What was your pathway into your role?

I've primarily worked for charities in my career including the RHS and Save the Children. After graduating it felt like I applied to a million jobs in conservation with no success or lots of 'you were our second choice'. So, I took a job in marketing and communications for a travel retailer. It wasn't what I wanted necessarily but I gained some really good transferable experience, and they were amazing at training me. I stepped into working for a charity so that I could have the 'purpose' element fulfilled. I then specialised in certain marketing areas, before making the transition to project management and innovation. One thing I did know is that I liked working with people and I liked the pace of high-pressured projects - it keeps me motivated and I like to see results; youth work is the same.

If you look at my CV, I have moved into quite a few different roles and areas, which sometimes is questioned. But my motivation is always to learn new things, build on my skills and experience, and increase responsibility. So don't be afraid to take that new challenge.

I loved my job at Save the Children, but after taking a sabbatical to travel I knew I had to get into conservation and was lucky enough to get a job as a Project Manager at the RSPB – this was my entry into the organisation and I worked my way from that role to becoming Communications Planning Manager, looking at how to effectively engage audiences, and from then I became Youth Development Manager. It is worth noting that I did quite a bit of volunteering while at university - with the RSPB and others - and I've also had various part-time jobs since I was 15, at home and university, including office-based work, working through summer vacation too. This was helpful in that it gave more financial independence and built up my experience at the same time.

What is the salary range for this type of role?

For a Youth Officer it could be from £20,000 - £27,000; for a Youth Manager it's more like £30,000 - £42,000 – but it can vary quite a lot from charity to charity.

Is a degree essential to your role?

No, experience is just as valuable.



Emily with the RSPB's Youth Council at Saltholme Nature Reserve

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What are the most useful skills to have for this role?

Relationship building is crucial - you need to like working with people and be able to establish good working relationships with all types of people quickly. Being able to adapt your communication style and approach for different audiences is critical, and the young people you work with will lead, so you must be a good, responsive listener.

You need to be flexible & risk-averse, because if you're a Youth Manager and you're not 'young' your way of thinking is bound to be challenged. This is why it's also helpful to be resilient: it is changing and progressing but working in a youth participatory way isn't how lots of organisations operate, so you may come across resistance to the actions you take.

Nearly everyone else I know who has this job is very busy; you must be organised and know how to prioritise, and how to collaborate effectively – with other organisations and your young people. You need to be good at motivating and driving collaboration but also know when to step back and let young people take the lead.

It is also important to have a good knowledge or experience of safeguarding for this role and being a First Aider also helps. You've also got to be willing to put the time in outside of normal office hours to accommodate young people's availability, as they may be at school, university or work during office hours.

CAREER PATHWAYS

What GCSEs could someone study to help get into this career?

If you're not sure, then I'd recommend going for a mixture so that you don't narrow down your choice too early. I did Art & Textiles as well as Geography, for example, before going on to Science because I didn't really know. Geography field trips may have been a motivation too...

What A-Levels or BTECs could someone study to help get into this career?

I chose all the Sciences and Maths - it did really help me get on to my Ecology course because it was a little more unusual to do ALL the Sciences and Maths, especially as a female. I was the only female on my Physics course for example. Chemistry and Maths really helped me in my degree as I had a really strong foundation to build on, and actually didn't need much more knowledge than I did at A Level. However, loads of people didn't do Maths and Chemistry and got on fine. If you are not going on to a Science course, it's not so important.

What could someone do after they leave school to help develop their skills for this career?

Try and work out what you like. What values are important to you and what do you enjoy? What are you really good at? What is your personality suited to? Don't do a degree just because you think you have to if it's not truly what you want.

If someone has graduated university, what next steps could they take to develop their skills for this career?

Be practical. Do you like further education? Can you afford it? My advice is to think about your work choices as stepping-stones - you might not get your ideal work straight away but what you can get valuable experience, or it may allow you to volunteer to get the experience you need. I worked in a pub for 8 months and volunteered with a conservation charity, for example, after graduating. I also took a job that wasn't in conservation because it gave me valuable transferable experience. I also had a lot of fun and met some amazing people. I chose jobs that had other benefits, so it wasn't a total compromise. Non-conservation degrees have so many transferable skills – solving the climate & nature crisis is huge and complex so we need all types of minds and people on the job: there is a role for everyone to play.