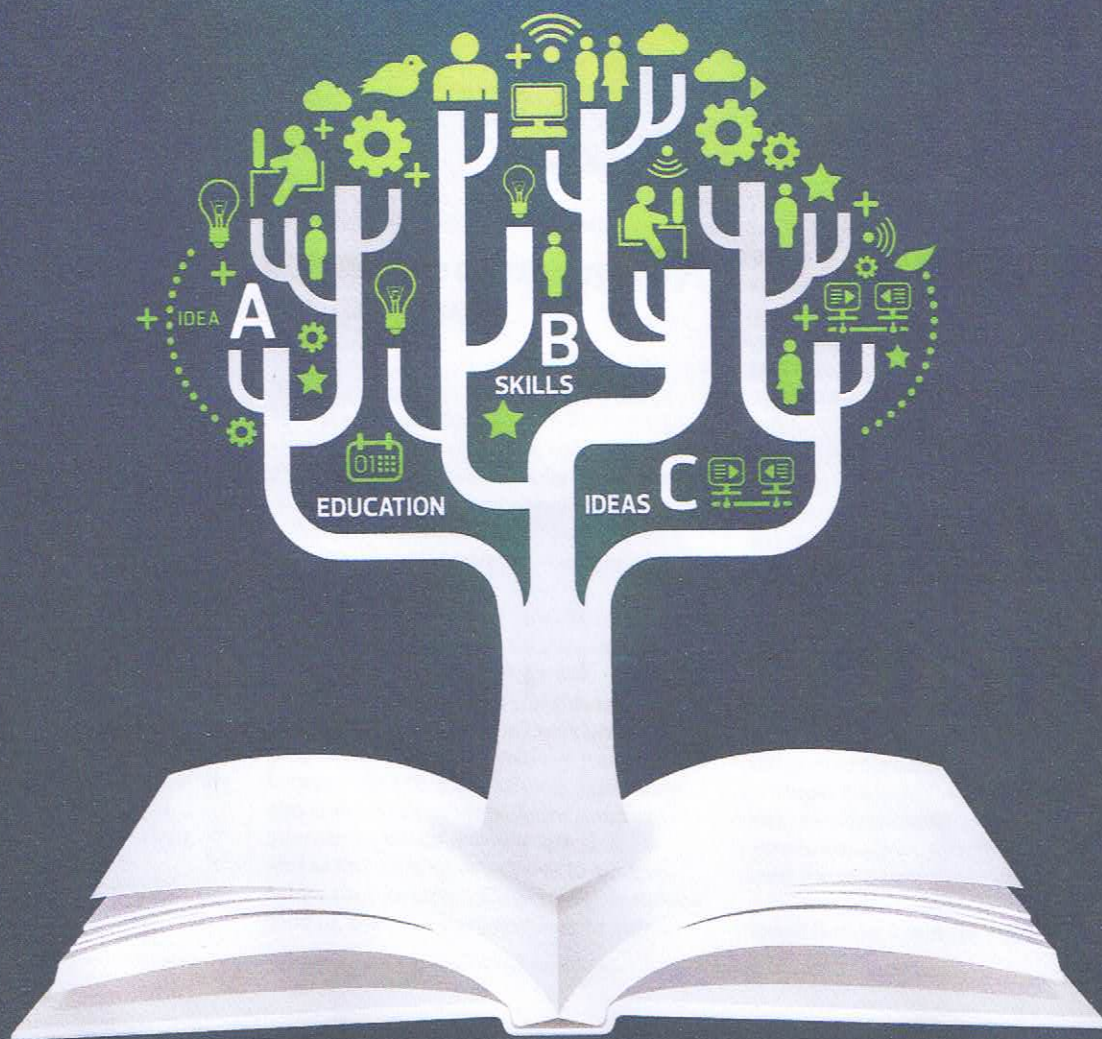


GRADUATE INTERFACE



In January, ICF hosted its second workshop with representatives from higher educational institutes teaching forestry and arboriculture. **Russell Horsey** reports

In 2013, when the Institute hosted its first meeting with representatives from higher educational institutes (HEIs) teaching forestry and arboriculture, the discussions concentrated on new course accreditation. Two years on, the HEIs were invited back to Manchester with industry representatives to look at how better to market forestry and arboriculture as attractive career paths.

It's fair to say that the sector continues to expand and the demand for forestry and arboriculture graduates is strong. So why then, when job prospects are high, is the sector still struggling to attract high-quality students? Is there a disconnect between

what is being taught and what employers want from their graduates?

To get a balanced view, the group first heard from CKD Galbraith, Network Rail, Sharon Hosegood Associates and Forestry Commission England, whose representatives describe what they want in a graduate.

Alongside good background knowledge of forestry and arboriculture, they also look for passion, good communication skills and the ability to plan and organise, and it is sometimes these softer skills which they find are missing. The question is: whose role is it to teach soft skills? Are they something a student should pick up, or should it be the responsibility of the universities or industry

to teach these? Most likely it will be a mix of all three.

Historically, companies have been able to recruit directly and fill positions at all levels. Today, though, many firms are faced with a need to develop structured career progression for new staff. For large firms such as UPM Tilhill, which has an established graduate programme, this is nothing new. However, it is alien to many small and medium-sized firms, whose numbers dominate the sector, and that's assuming that these companies can fill their vacancies.

In the afternoon's round-table discussions, perhaps the most important



If the student proves a good fit, then the company may be able to offer post-graduate employment

Problem identified was that of the sector's image. Careers advisors still see the sector's jobs as low paid, dirty, and not something parents may classify as a good, upstanding profession. Have things really moved on from Monty Python 'lumberjack' sketches of old? These views led to debate when the HEIs went on to discuss how to address these concerns/stumbling blocks.

The group acknowledged that the image issue isn't new or even specific to our sector – engineering, once also seen as a dirty job, faced the same problem 10 years ago, identifying that it was often the parents who were discouraging applications to university courses. That industry worked hard to change this perception through modern approaches and through joined-up engagement between HEIs and employers.

The Institute and other bodies are

working to change the perception that the sector is poorly paid with limited job opportunities. New awards, such as the Prince of Wales Forest Leadership award, will not only offer great opportunities to successful students, but will be something that parents will aspire for their children to win.

The group discussed how HEIs and the sector generally have to follow examples like engineering and engage with prospect students earlier, particularly through new forms of social media and outreach programmes. These should not just be between the HEIs and schools, but should also embrace employers. More summer internships would improve soft skills, as well as introducing employers to students before they graduate. If the student proves a good fit, then the company may be able to

offer post-graduate employment with less risk to the business (and no expensive recruitment advertising). The offer of a paid summer internship would give forestry and arboriculture a greater appeal and would offer far more value than working in a supermarket or a coffee shop during holidays to cover some of those tuition fees.

In summing up, the group agreed that HEIs do need to up their game to compete, but that they can't work in isolation. ICF and employers alike need to promote our sector and the careers on offer whenever opportunities arise. The 'Grown in Britain' campaign continues to communicate positive messages for the sector and is celebrated during Grown in Britain week (this year from 13 to 19 October). I would ask that we all engage with, and inspire, the next generation of tree professionals by inviting school children to see where you work, to talk about what you do or, if the opportunity arises, by talking to the media about the great careers in our sector.

Russell Horsey, Deputy Director, ICF

Institute grows from strength to strength

Introducing 'Grow', a new campaign which places members at its core. **Julie Adamson** explains

Over the past few years the Institute has gone from strength to strength, reaching its highest ever membership this year. Like our members, the ICF is proud of this growth, but we recognise that there is no room for complacency. It is imperative that we build on this momentum to ensure that ICF's professional membership remains the ultimate goal for anyone starting out on a path to a career in forestry or arboriculture.

At ICF's second meeting of UK Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in January, ways of attracting more young people into the profession were discussed.

One of the significant outcomes was the collective desire to see a professionalisation of the public image of foresters. Secondary level students and their parents are still seeing forestry as chainsaws and plaid shirts, rather than what it is – a highly technical career choice demanding a wide range of skills. Having worked on the concept of ICF's new campaign, it was pleasing to see that my objectives mirrored those of the HEIs. The aims of ICF's Grow campaign are

twofold: firstly, to demonstrate the wide diversity of career paths in the forestry and arboriculture sector. We have featured ICF professional members at the forefront of our marketing through a set of case studies. While their jobs are quite different, we will show that an important common thread that binds them together – their commitment to professionalism in the sector.

Secondly, to focus on the benefits of

membership. Each case study has a key message which gets to the heart of our members' connections with ICF. These are: Growing Talent, Growing Careers, Growing Credibility, Growing Influence and Growing Business.

I am now excited to see what 2015 brings as I coax more ICF professional members into the careers spotlight.

Julie Adamson, Marketing and Communications Officer, ICF

Find out more...

Read our membership case studies at www.charteredforesters.org/grow

