

PGT REPORT
Sarah Kirton

Ernest Cook Award – Safe use of pesticide certificates PA1 & PA6.

I am currently a trainee gardener with a position with the MacRobert Trust on their Horticultural Training Scheme. The placement is based up in Aberdeenshire, NE Scotland.

I studied Horticulture with the SRUC in Edinburgh and gained an HND. It has been the perfect opportunity to gain a place with the MacRobert Trust and learn hands on the practical skills required to work in horticulture.

PA1 and PA6 certification is a vital skill and qualification to have for anyone intending the work in gardens. I was awarded £220 from the Ernest Cook Award to help fund the training for this certificate.

The training courses and assessments were provided by Ringlink Services Ltd. The total costs combined came to £445. The PA1 training was held at the Burnett Arms hotel in Banchory on March 20th and the PA6 followed on March 22nd at my place of work, Douneside House gardens, where all PPE and knapsack spraying equipment was provided.

The PA1 course was all classroom based and covered the topics of what is a pesticide, legislation, labels, health & safety, environmental factors, storage, transport, disposal, record keeping and dealing with accidents. We worked through a workbook and filled in answers to questions for each topic. The instructor had brought in a variety of PPE to show us, which was good to see what the minimum requirements were but also what equipment is available to choose from and what would be the best for us to personally use.

It was a lot of information to get through and learn but I made sure to take good notes and ask plenty of questions throughout. Having the workbook and a copy of Pesticides: Code of Practice for Using Plant Protection Products in Scotland (also available on the Scottish Executive website: www.scotland.gov.uk) were a good source to refer back to and revise from.

The PA6 course is much more about the practical training in how to operate the equipment and carry out spraying in a safe and efficient manner. We started with a short classroom session going over the different parts of the equipment and spent a bit of time looking at nozzles. The type of nozzle is important to consider depending on the target that is being sprayed and the environmental conditions of the day. Outside we were then shown how to do all the safety checks on the knapsack sprayers and did an environmental assessment. The sprayers then need to be calibrated to the operator to ensure efficient spraying. Pacing, flow rate, swath width and the area to be sprayed were all measured and we then used a calculation sheet to work out the required volume of chemical and water mix that would go in the knapsack tank. At first all the calculations seemed a bit daunting but once we'd worked through the calculations sheets it was all quite straight forward and easy.

We did quite a lot of practise of doing the calibrations and then going through the procedures of safely mixing and filling the knapsacks, while using all the appropriate PPE. With the tanks filled with just water we simulated walking and spraying a set area so we could master a steady and accurate operation. At first quite often our tanks would run out before the area had been fully covered, suggesting that we were walking slower than calibrated or pumping too quickly. It was good to have

the time to calibrate ourselves properly and by the end we were spraying an area and finishing with minimal solution left over, therefore confident that we were spraying efficiently.



Practising to achieve a steady pace, flow rate and swath width

A few days after the training I sat the assessments which I passed with confidence and I'm now pleased to hold a PA1 and PA6 certificate. I will now be able to use this training and certification straight away at my place of work, which will help consolidate the skills and knowledge I have already gained. This will be hugely beneficial in securing future jobs and progressing with my career and also has given me the confidence to do so.

I would like to thank the PGT and the Ernest Cook Award for helping me achieve this qualification by providing the funding to make all of this more affordable. I would also like to thank Ringlink for providing the training and the gardens team at the MacRobert Trust for supporting me through it.

Sarah Kirton
April 2017



Happy to now hold a PA1/6 certificate