

Post Study Report to PGTrust

My name is Tom Brownson, I am 28 years old and I work for a small gardening business based in Derbyshire. My job currently involves driving a company vehicle and conducting regular maintenance visits to customer's gardens as well as performing grounds maintenance at a number of schools and housing developments in the local area. I mostly work independently although sometimes I operate as part of a small team.

I have been working for the business since June of 2016, although previously I had been working in the retail sector which I found to be very unfulfilling and unsuited to my interests and personality and was therefore searching for a total change of career. I was lucky enough to be offered this opportunity by my current employer, who I initially worked with closely in order to gain a general experience of what I would be expected to do when I would eventually be working alone, however some sort of formal qualification in horticulture was deemed to be both practical and necessary to establish knowledge of the basic principles of horticultural practices.

I therefore applied to undertake the RHS Level 2 Certificate in Practical Horticulture at The Cheadle College at a cost of £727.00 which I was not able to finance by myself. Upon the advice of my employer I contacted the PGTrust and submitted an application for funding to help me cover some of the cost of my training, which I received in the form of a £500 grant from the Ernest Cook Foundation to support training for gardeners under 30.

I embarked on the course at Cheadle College in September of 2016 which provided introductory coverage of a wide of horticulture subjects taught both in the classroom and outside on the college grounds. These included learning about and practicing various propagation methods of plants from seeds and cuttings, learning the correct botanical names for selected plants and how to identify them which we were tested on a weekly basis, learning and demonstrating correct pruning and plant care techniques as well as how to correctly prepare a site for cultivation which we focused on extensively as we gradually transformed an area of the college into a thriving vegetable garden (see **Fig 1.**)



Fig 1. - Preparing college site for cultivation, I am pictured on the left of the image.

What I found particularly interesting and relevant to my own career was gaining the ability to recognise species of plants from sight and to be able to recall them by their correct botanical name as this is a problem I come across in my job on a daily basis and wasn't very well informed about before I started studying. I also found it extremely useful to learn the correct procedures for the use and maintenance of various garden tools as well as how to carry out important ground preparation techniques such as double digging which I have since employed myself in some of the more under-developed gardens I have worked in. I have also come to realise the hard work and dedication involved in horticulture but learnt the rewards of perseverance and teamwork.

On the whole I would say that the experience of studying has been a very beneficial one, it has directly led to an increased feeling of confidence and knowledge that I have transferred back into my own job as a professional gardener. It has also awoken in me a desire to develop my career in horticulture in the long-term and to continue to further my education by looking at more advanced courses to further supplement and increase my understanding of this extremely wide-ranging discipline, particularly in the aspects of garden design and national heritage.