

Cultivating futures: student and early career experiences at the National Botanic Garden of Wales

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As a group of early-career horticulturalists at the National Botanic Garden of Wales (NBGW), we present our reflective learnings and experiences in botanic horticulture to showcase what contributes to an exemplary early career experience, as part of student schemes and outreach projects. The poster will highlight current and past accomplishments of our students and colleagues and will communicate the benefits of involving and giving early career staff a voice in strategic planning and project planning processes from the ground up. We will share our involvement and learnings in the process of updating NBGW's Strategic Plan and creating a Values and Behaviour Framework. Furthermore, some examples of the project work current and former students have undertaken will be shared including: development of the National Collection of Welsh Apple Varieties; conservation of Welsh natives via propagation and preservation as herbarium specimens; and conservation of threatened plants from Mediterranean climates. We hope to inspire botanic garden leaders and managers to initiate or further develop their student schemes. We advocate for critical consideration of how their garden schemes can instil early career horticulturalists with the core values needed to be horticulture leaders of the future and ensure sustainable careers. These schemes also need to be designed so as to support aspiring contemporary horticulturalists to carry out the conservation work of botanic gardens into the future and enable succession planning for horticulture to meet the future needs of a broad society.