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Students. Can't live with them, can't live without them.

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Three years ago I was a student at Plymouth University. I was coming to the end of my degree in Environmental Science with no real picture of what was next, or how to progress. All I knew was I wanted to be in science and conservation. Both fields are so competitive most people work for free just to be involved. It is an honour to be in such a dedicated and important field and those of us who are able should do our very best to involve those who show passion and dedication.

Students deserve much more credit than they currently receive. Although not always fully focused, ultimately you have passionate people who can be much more open to new ideas than their professional counterparts. They're not bogged down by professional expectations, fear of being replaced or Council Tax. They are passionate people at the very beginning of their career, no less capable of being useful than the rest of us. It is because of this, I try to involve students as much as I can in my work.

Firstly, Dartmoor Zoological Park. It is a small company finding its feet. It has grand and bold ideas of eventually being one of the top organisations in the zoological community. It hopes one day to be a leader in animal conservation, education and research and has started on that road already. To assist this, it has designed its policies specifically to increase student participation and more importantly to allow their own ideas to be heard. In the context of the zoo, students are irreplaceable. Students volunteer within most departments. They help look after the major animal collections, perform educational talks and conduct scientific research without asking for anything in return.

Academic placements, for example, are a great way to do this and can be critical for future career prospects as they demonstrate the ability to use what is learnt in the lecture theatre and apply it in real life. Dartmoor Zoological Park chose to increase

its placement scope this academic year to allow more students into its programme. It is a truly symbiotic relationship. The zoo would not have active Conservation & Research Departments if it wasn't for students. Allowing students to experience the realities of both work and research provides them with an excellent base for their future careers, especially due to the importance placed on previous experience in the world today. This is something the zoo strives to offer, a way for students to gain the required experience while also performing real world roles and jobs. The relationship Dartmoor Zoological Park has formed with Plymouth University demonstrates a way for all parties involved to benefit.

Secondly, The Science Assembly. This is a very strange company. It's not based on profit, prestige or competition. In fact its goals are very humble. The amount of new discoveries taking place every single day is astounding. Concepts we thought were set in stone years ago are being smashed and rewritten all around us and people rarely see it. Science is amazing but it often has the unfortunate reputation of being unapproachable - just for the geeks. Every single person on this planet will find at least one aspect of science amazing, interesting or beautiful, whether it's knowing how environments interact, how robots are made or the beauty of our universe, there is something for everyone. This is a company that gives students an avenue to convey their enthusiasm for science and conservation. It has been built on the premise that anyone can understand and enjoy science if taught in the right way by passionate people, it is a democracy not built around deadlines or money but enthusiasm. In many ways it is a student company. Students help run the company and will ultimately decide if the company rises or falls. In its first year, students will have the potential to alter the route the company takes and make meaningful decisions for its future.

The Science Assembly offers students a chance to join groups of people enjoying their favourite scientific topics, whether it's biology, quantum physics, robotics or ecology, if an 'Assembly Group' doesn't exist yet, one will be created, and they'll run it. What each individual group does and how they do it is up to them, each group acts as a single entity of the larger group. That's probably why there's a group trying to get a balloon into orbit... it's fantastic!

I do not believe in a one way 'academic - student' relationship. I believe academics should teach students, students should teach students and quite importantly, students should teach academics. Organisational structures are a great way of deciding blame but not much else. Science should be a democracy, an avenue to explore ideas in an environment that allows unconditional creativity unhindered by where the person is in life.

I can say without a doubt that I have experienced genuine value from the students I work with, whether an academic placement, dissertation/ thesis student or colleague. Don't get me wrong, it's not the easiest relationship in the world. But without students' enthusiasm, willingness to take part and work hard, Dartmoor Zoological

Park would not have active scientific research and The Science Assembly would simply not exist. Students are the only group I know who don't moan when it passes 17:00 and would drive for hours just to be involved. Because of this, I thank them.

Adam Cook Graduated with a BSc in Environmental Science in 2010 at Plymouth University to become a public speaker at The National Marine Aquarium the same year. 2011 saw that experience leading to the development of a public engagement department at Dartmoor Zoological Park and his scientific mind to Head of Conservation & Research in 2012. With a student led ethos Adam expanded the departments' output by 1500% in the first year alone leading to an Associate Lecturership at Plymouth University in early 2013. This has culminated in Adam incorporating a new Science Communication and engagement company 'The Science Assembly' in mid 2013.

In those three years Adam conducted public and private talks to an estimated 50,000 individuals, coordinated a range of research projects including animal behaviour, genetics and conservation, created Scientific Advisory Boards, assisted in the development of FdSc and BSc courses as well as the creation of conservation projects on butterflies on Dartmoor and wolves in Portugal.

If you are a student and wish to conduct a research project at Dartmoor Zoological Park, simply email Adam at adam.cook@dartmoorzoo.co.uk

The Science Assembly is steered by students. They create groups, lead events, design media and more. If you wish to be a part of The Science Assembly, simply email Adam at adam.cook@scienceassembly.co.uk or go to www.scienceassembly.co.uk