

Skills for Work CASE STUDY

Rural Skills Intermediate One

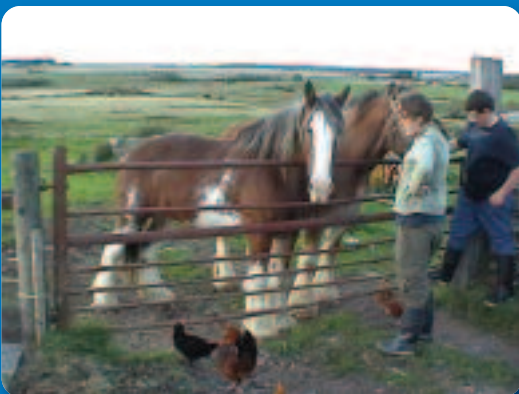
Whalsay School in the Shetland Islands, in formal partnership with The Crofters Commission, successfully piloted the Course. The partners recruited and employed a local crofter to assist in its delivery while links with the Soil Association and Shetland Islands Council Economic Development and Education Departments were also forged.

Rationale

Over the past two years the school has been working towards a flexible curriculum with the emphasis on pupils' choice and individual needs.

This course increased vocational options as courses in Construction and Aquaculture, run in partnership with Shetland College and North Atlantic Fisheries College, have been offered at the school.

It also complemented its "eco schools" ambitions and provided curriculum links with other projects. The aim was to develop essential, employability skills and knowledge among pupils that will help sustain the island's future economic development.



Partnership Arrangements

The Crofters Commission pays the crofter to take part in the delivery of the course for one day per fortnight and also provided funds towards the pupils' travel costs to events in Inverness.

The Islands' Council has given generous funding for the two-year pilot to help purchase equipment, storage facilities, seeds, protective clothing, transport, residential costs for a trip to Moray, a Poly Tunnel and teaching materials. Its Economic Development Department also funded the construction of toilet facilities at the croft.



Delivery Approaches

The key to the successful delivery of the course has been timetabling, making it part of the timetable and pupil option choices, not an add-on subject. Five pupils were on the course having completed a four-week induction period.

They were of mixed abilities, ranging from those with some Learning Support needs to pupils sitting seven credit Standard Grades.

An enthusiastic teacher, who is also completing a variety of staff development opportunities to build on existing skills, including Excellence in Education through Business Links work placements and distance learning courses, led the course.

The first year included free-of-charge trips to Moray where pupils visited a range of land-based industries that they would not have access to in Shetland such as dairy farms, organic box schemes, large-scale commercial farming, small-scale organic farming, forestry, a packing factory and more. The pupils were able to gather produce from various sites and prepared their own meals in the evening.

To build upon the links established with the Crofters Commission and the Soil Association, pupils will attend the Planting to Plate event in Inverness in September 2007. The pupils will represent the school and the island taking locally produced food and performing dialect poetry and local fiddle music.

Visits to mainland Scotland helped form links with other schools and this included a two-day visit to Inverness High's Real Organics Project.

Because of its remote island location, the school has pinpointed consistent internal and external verification as a challenge that can be overcome with imagination and effort.

“ It’s been a new experience and good to learn new skills, especially ones about Shetland life. ”

View from candidate, Ellie Rickard



Employability Skills

Part of the success in attracting pupils of all abilities to the course was emphasising on employability to parents. The skills being developed, such as self-assessment and risk assessment, are transferrable to all career areas not just land-based industries although these will become, increasingly, a key to the island's economic sustainability. The course also provides progression routes to SPA awards, HNDs, degrees and so forth.

Centre Evaluation

The school is pleased with the excellent support from the SQA and, despite its location and limited staff and resources, it is confident that it is delivering a robust course open to scrutiny by all forms of verification. It has been creative in forming partners and employing different strategies to ensure appropriate verification procedures.



“ Rural Skills has been really good, I enjoy it very much. ”

View from candidate, Culum Wishart



Future Delivery Plans

The present year group will continue with the two-year pilot and be joined by a second cohort of up to eight pupils from a 17 pupil cohort. The school has secured funding to take all the pupils on a one week trip to mainland Scotland and to complete the Poly Tunnel project.

It is hoping for additional funding to equip the Tunnel with a wind turbine to power the water system and a PC to monitor growth through web cams and to provide links to partners on improvements at the croft, including plans for re-instating crops. It is forging new links with land-based industries in Shetland such as Shetland Dairies that will further enhance the pupils' experience.

Advice

Establishing good and clear partnership agreements, the support of the local authority and a clear message of the aims of the course are vital.

So, too, is communication with parents with emphasis on the employability skills for pupils. Links with other schools' activities should be pursued and the course should encourage access across pupils' abilities and interests.

A lot of time needs to be spent on securing funding and the school management support should allow the course teacher to concentrate on teaching and learning and individual development.



“It’s a great course to teach and so many people are enthusiastic about the possibilities. Its success depends on the commitment of pupils, teachers and industry.”

View from Rural Skills teacher, Emily Priest