



Scottish Qualifications Authority

Strathmore Foods and Angus College

An English for Speakers of Other Languages Case Study



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Who are Strathmore Foods?

Strathmore Foods is a leading manufacturer of frozen and chilled foods based in Forfar, Tayside that produces under the Countryside and McIntosh labels as well as private labels. The company was founded over forty years ago and has grown to be one of the larger employers in the Forfar area.

Why the need for English language classes?

In recent years Strathmore Foods has experienced increasing difficulty in recruiting from the local indigenous population and was therefore one of the first companies in Forfar to employ migrant workers from non EU and EU countries including the eight EU Accession countries, more specifically Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Czech Republic and Ukraine.

The company recognised that a key factor in the success of their recruitment and retention policy would be provision of English language classes to help overcome language barriers. According to the company's HR/Operations Director Liz Jackson, "We believed that classes would help the individuals improve their English skills and increase their confidence both in and outwith the workplace. Secondly they would allow Strathmore Foods to continue the training and development of individuals no matter what their level of English, and thirdly they would provide a better working environment where everyone understood what was being said and what was being asked of them."

How did Strathmore Foods get started with ESOL classes?

Strathmore Foods contacted Angus College and agreed that a college tutor would deliver English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes at beginner level to 15 migrant worker employees. Classes took place in the Forfar Learning Centre which is part of Angus College. They took place once a week on a Tuesday evening after work in order to be as flexible as possible for all concerned, although there were some weeks when classes had to be cancelled due to production pressures and the need for the migrant worker employees to work overtime. Classes ran for ten weeks from May 2006 and then recommenced in August for seven weeks.

As the level of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills varied across the group, the group was split into beginner and pre intermediate levels to assess their English language abilities across the four skills. Angus College then worked around these skills accordingly during the classes and assessments. The course consisted of the Unit 'English for Work and Study' at Access 3 level.

What role did Angus College play?

Angus College assigned one designated tutor for the duration of the classes and took sole responsibility for the SQA registration processes as well as all teaching and assessment. Liz Jackson explained, “Strathmore really took a back seat and let the employees and Angus College work together in partnership. Strathmore gave the college the flexibility to teach how they wished and only asked for specific job-related words, phrases and situations to be included to ensure maximum benefit was gained by all parties.” Liz added, “Strathmore was here for advice, support and guidance or to communicate changes to times etc and always received an update on performance and abilities of each individual on a regular basis from the college.” At the end of the course all 15 students achieved an SQA NQ ESOL qualification ‘English for Work and Study’ at Access 3.

How were the ESOL classes funded?

The classes were originally joint-funded by Strathmore Foods and Scottish Enterprise Tayside. This developed into a European Social Fund project managed by Angus College, with no cost incurred by the company. The students have now progressed to the next level, Intermediate 1, which is being funded by students’ Individual Learning Accounts.

What were the benefits for the migrant workers?

As the migrant workers received a nationally recognised SQA qualification, and therefore recognition for their efforts, attendance at classes was very high. The migrant worker students have stated that they have more confidence in the workplace and are more likely to ask questions if they are unsure about a task that has been asked of them.

They enjoy more interaction with everyone around them and some have been able to progress into more responsible roles. Just as importantly, they have more confidence in personal and social situations such as meeting new friends outside the workplace and going to the local supermarket, bank or chemist.

What benefits did Strathmore Foods gain?

Strathmore Foods report that they are already reaping the benefits of their ESOL classes. They are able to use a wider range of communication methods than would otherwise have been possible to deliver their core training and development programmes. As migrant workers gain more confidence and proficiency in the English language the company has been able to continue its policy of promoting from within. Relationships among teams and between teams have improved. Labour turnover has been reduced to a negligible level, attendance has improved and perhaps most significantly, productivity has increased. Liz Jackson states, “The company has a happier and contented work force as they can see we are investing in their future.”

What next for Strathmore Foods ESOL classes?

All 15 migrant workers have progressed to the next level and have started a 22 week part-time SQA NQ ESOL Intermediate 1 Course at Angus College. When asked if there had been any problems or issues during the course Liz replied, “I can honestly say that we have had no problems either with the employees or with Angus College. It has all worked out really well and we are looking at starting a further group in the future as the majority of our migrant workers are very keen either to develop their existing English skills or to start learning the basics. It is a real asset to an organisation to get involved with programmes such as this. The benefits for both sides are excellent. I hope the relationship and links between our employees, Angus College and SQA continue for a long time to come especially with the increase of migrant labour to the UK and our local neighbourhood.”

Further information

For advice and further information on SQA’s range of ESOL Units and Courses please visit SQA’s website www.sqa.org.uk/esol or contact either of the following:

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