



Marriott, Express and Thistle Hotels, Inverness

Background

Inverness Hotels Association (IHA) is a group of 21 of the main hotels in Inverness including hotels from the world's leading hotel groups – the Marriott, Thistle, Ramada Jarvis, Best Western and Express by Holiday Inn. As a group the IHA works together to enhance the hospitality and tourism industry in Inverness, both in terms of the guest experience and also on behalf of hotel employees.

Why the need for work-based ESOL classes?

Since 2005 the number of migrant worker employees from Eastern Europe has increased rapidly and, in the IHA's experience, the English language competence of more recent migrant worker recruits has dropped from the standard of earlier arrivals. According to the IHA migrant workers in hotels are typically employed in Housekeeping, Portering, Restaurants, Bars and Kitchens, and occasionally in Reception. Employees lacked confidence in interacting with guests, especially in the dining rooms. Managers and supervisors found that employees were not following instructions because they did not understand them. Stephen Gow, General Manager of the Thistle Hotel, Inverness and IHA Chairperson states, "If employees were to interact effectively with colleagues and guests it became clear that we would need to offer work-based English classes to improve migrant worker employees' communication skills in the field of hospitality."

How did the Inverness hotels get started with work-based ESOL classes?

The IHA approached a training consultant who put them in touch with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), Highland. The WEA runs a very successful English At Work Programme in Inverness where they can offer ESOL classes tailored to suit the needs of employers. The WEA's English at Work Programme delivers SQA accredited work-based ESOL Units twice a week in the Thistle and Express by Holiday Inn hotels with learners from both hotels, as well as the Marriott and Drumossie. Other hotels within the IHA are set to join in the next round of courses. Classes typically comprise 6-8 learners from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

What role does The WEA play?

The WEA Highland has been delivering 10 week SQA accredited work-based ESOL Units at the equivalent of NQF Entry 3 twice a week to IHA employee learners since April 07. Employees with a higher competence in English have been able to work towards an SQA ESOL qualification at the equivalent of NQF Level 1 with the WEA's partner North Highland College. The WEA provides experienced ESOL tutors who

create resources with content geared to the performance criteria, and with content drawn from workplace. The lessons are held at the end of learners' shifts. Stephen Gow states, "Specific hospitality-based ESOL lessons do work as we need employees to be able to give guests advice on hotel and local facilities and give guests directions to local attractions such as Loch Ness. We also need employees to understand manual handling guidelines, fire safety and food hygiene and SQA work-based ESOL covers all that."

How are the SQA work-based ESOL classes funded?

Initially funding for the courses was provided by the WEA, whose funders include Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Highland Adult Literacies. Recently, part funding for courses is being provided by hotel employers including the Marriott, Express and Thistle Hotels.

What benefits did the hotels gain from the WEA English at Work programme?

The WEA reports that learners have shown increased confidence and are more willing to initiate discussions and conversations. Stephen Gow adds, "Our new colleagues from overseas now feel very valued as the programme allows them to achieve their potential in the workplace. As they progress through the lessons they understand more, are more productive and are becoming more involved in the business." Stephen continues, "In the hotel business communication and safety with respect to colleagues and guests are paramount - the SQA & WEA's Course improves both."

What were the benefits for the migrant workers?

The employees receive a nationally recognised SQA ESOL qualification at the equivalent of NQF Entry 3 which will allow them to progress to the next level of ESOL and advance within their current jobs. They are able to initiate conversations and respond to requests from guests. They understand key health and safety training without the need for translated materials and interpreters. Four learners from one of the classes held in the Thistle are from Poland and are studying for an SQA ESOL qualification at the equivalent of NQF Entry 3. Magda Kopec from Poland works in Housekeeping in the Marriott and comments, "Before, we had problems with Speaking, Listening, Understanding...everything". Her colleague Amilia Bujak adds, "Now we can speak with guests and understand them. We also understand how we must lift heavy items". Kasia Kustra works in the restaurant in the Thistle and agrees, "We understand more." Margorzata Dziubak, continues, "I now understand things like to look carefully at different packages in rooms and if we see something wrong we must tell the Manager." The WEA tutor, Sheila Mitchell concludes, "The WEA English at Work programme using SQA work-based ESOL Units is designed to help the learners both in the workplace and in everyday life."

For advice and further information on SQA's Certificates in ESOL for Work please contact: Eunice McAllister, ESOL Business Development Manager
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