

Strathaird Salmon, a Young's Seafood Company

Company Background

Strathaird Salmon in Inverness is part of the Young's Seafood group of companies and is a leading supplier of premium quality Scottish salmon products to most UK multiple retailers and prestige independent store groups such as Harrods, Jenners, Caviar House and Harvey Nichols. Strathaird Salmon also exports to North America and Europe. The company is a major employer with around 350 employees rising to around 500 during peak production times.



Why the need for work-based ESOL classes?

In recent years the company has actively recruited migrant worker employees to overcome difficulties in local recruitment. The number of workers from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Iraq employed with Strathaird Salmon has risen rapidly and accounts for 75% of the workforce.

The company recognised that a key factor in the success of this recruitment policy would be the use of English as the core language by all employees. If the factory was to run safely and effectively it was vital that all employees were able to understand and respond to spoken and written communications in key areas such as food hygiene, quality standards and health and safety. It was felt that some migrant worker employees, understandably, were afraid to admit that they did not understand what was being asked of them. Kevin Gates, Site Director, states, "We felt that it was part of our corporate responsibility to provide fair employment conditions such as help with accommodation, flexible working as well as provision of on-site English at Work classes."

How did Strathaird Salmon get started with SQA work-based ESOL classes?

Initially the company encouraged their employees to attend general English community classes, however in January 2006 Bill MacDonald, HR Manager, asked the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in Inverness to provide English at Work classes on-site. Strathaird Salmon would provide the premises, class time at shift end and motivational support from charge-hands and line managers. Judie Holliday, WEA English at Work Programme Co-ordinator reports, "Bill MacDonald, factory supervisors and managers have always made themselves available to our tutors and co-ordinator for consultation. Bill has also given factory tours to the tutors and provided materials for producing learning resources." Provision of English at Work classes is supported from the head office of the Young's Seafoods group in Grimsby.

What role does The Workers Educational Association play?

The WEA has been delivering work-based ESOL classes since January 2006. After 14 months the WEA progressed to offering 10 week SQA-accredited courses to learners from all areas of the factory – from production to dispatch – and finds that on-site provision makes it easier to adapt lessons to meet the language needs of the business as they arise. One class was also given for charge-hands and office staff. Classes are now offered four times a week but are carefully planned not to conflict with peak production times of the year and holiday periods. The SQA accredited courses cover the following topics:

- Checking information such as Contracts of Employment
- Hygiene rules/uniform • Health and safety regulations and signs
- Explaining health problems • Requesting time off and phoning to report an absence
- Giving and asking for directions

How are the work-based ESOL classes funded?

ESOL classes are funded by the WEA through Highland and Islands Enterprise and Highland Adult Literacies.

What benefits did Strathaird Salmon gain from work-based ESOL classes?

Strathaird Salmon are delighted with the quality of teaching from the WEA tutors and believe that the level is appropriate for its employees. Bill MacDonald confirms, "Our input has been incorporated into the English at Work course to ensure that employees learned the work-related English needed by the business. Our supervisors have reported a marked improvement in learners and some have even been promoted. Communication and morale has improved and there is a closer working relationship between migrant workers and the company. They feel valued by the company and part of a long-term partnership."

Kevin Gates concludes, "The management team can communicate with migrant workers and are assured that the factory is operating in a more efficient and safe way. Waste and errors have been reduced and we are able to tell our customers that we offer ethical health and safety training programmes. This is a key aspect in customer perception."

What were the benefits for the migrant workers?

As more and more of the migrant worker employees receive a nationally recognized SQA ESOL qualification they understand more of the work-related English they need for their day-to-jobs. They also gain a greater understanding of the English needed for everyday communication outside work. They have greater confidence and interaction with co-workers on the shop floor and are able to understand critical areas such as quality standards, hygiene and health and safety, reducing errors and risk.

For advice and further information on SQA's Certificates in ESOL for Work please contact: Eunice McAllister, ESOL Business Development Manager
M: 07789 396395 E: Eunice.McAllister@sqa.org.uk
www.sqainternational.org.uk