

Skills for Work CASE STUDY

Rural Skills Intermediate One

Balfron High School, in partnership with Oatridge College, Lantra, Forestry Commission, Loch Lomond National Park, Cashel Forest for a Thousand Years, Daye Tucker, Carbeth Home Farm, Careers Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and several local land-based industry employers, successfully offered this course.

Rationale

Balfron High, situated in rural West Stirlingshire, felt for some time that a number of pupils with skills and knowledge of farming and the countryside would benefit from a rural vocational course.

Partnership Arrangements

A wide range of interested parties attended a meeting in March 2005 and SPIRE (Strathendrick Partnership in Rural Education) was born. The first steps of this were eagerly agreed and a follow-up timetabling meeting in June 2006 selected the units and decided on the partners to best offer the different practical skills required.

A similar meeting is planned for this summer to consider the introduction of further units.



Delivery Approach

What has been described as imaginative creativity by school rector, Val Corry produced a block of time for one afternoon a week (12~3.30pm) plus two classroom periods for the course.

Five boys and five girls started it and the school created parent information packs and then held a parents' evening once pupils had made their selection. New forms were produced for medical information, personal protective equipment (PPE) and parental consent to enable pupils to be out of school on a weekly basis.

Two staff members have been involved with the course to date and all progress and development is discussed on a weekly basis.

The school says excellent Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) materials along with SQA course outcome criteria and NABs are used. A good selection of DVDs and videos to support the course work have been bought, the Scottish Farmer publication has a new subscriber and internet research has proved a valuable resource, especially for the Land-based Industries Investigation unit.

Astutely, the course has a half hour rule whereby pupils are not travelling in the school minibus for more than 30 minutes for most of the practical sessions. Pupils, too, could monitor how they were doing by keeping a weekly electronic diary on their practical skills work. They also had access to PowerPoint and electronic whiteboard technology. Their activities have been recorded to enable staff to keep visual evidence of pupils' practical work.

“ I have seen first hand dramatic leaps in maturity as participants grow in stature through performing real tasks in a real world situation ”

View from Daye Tucker, employer



Employability Skills

The practical nature of this course ensures that employability skills run throughout all of the practical units – it is a half unit in its own right.

Pupils were encouraged continuously to consider a number of issues at every stage: employer time, resources, health and safety, listening to and following employer instructions and attendance/timekeeping for each task that they were expected to carry out. Employers also gave regular feedback to pupils on how they were progressing and pupils had several opportunities to review how they thought they had done in comparison to what the employers were thinking. Clearly, this was not always the same thing!

The scope of this well thought-out course also produced opportunities for development of literacy, numeracy, IT and communication skills along with PSE activities that included vital components of teamwork, citizenship, self-discipline and personal responsibility.

The activities also created suitable openings for pupils to develop self-esteem and confidence. All of these skills are regarded as valuable, transferable life skills.

Centre Evaluation

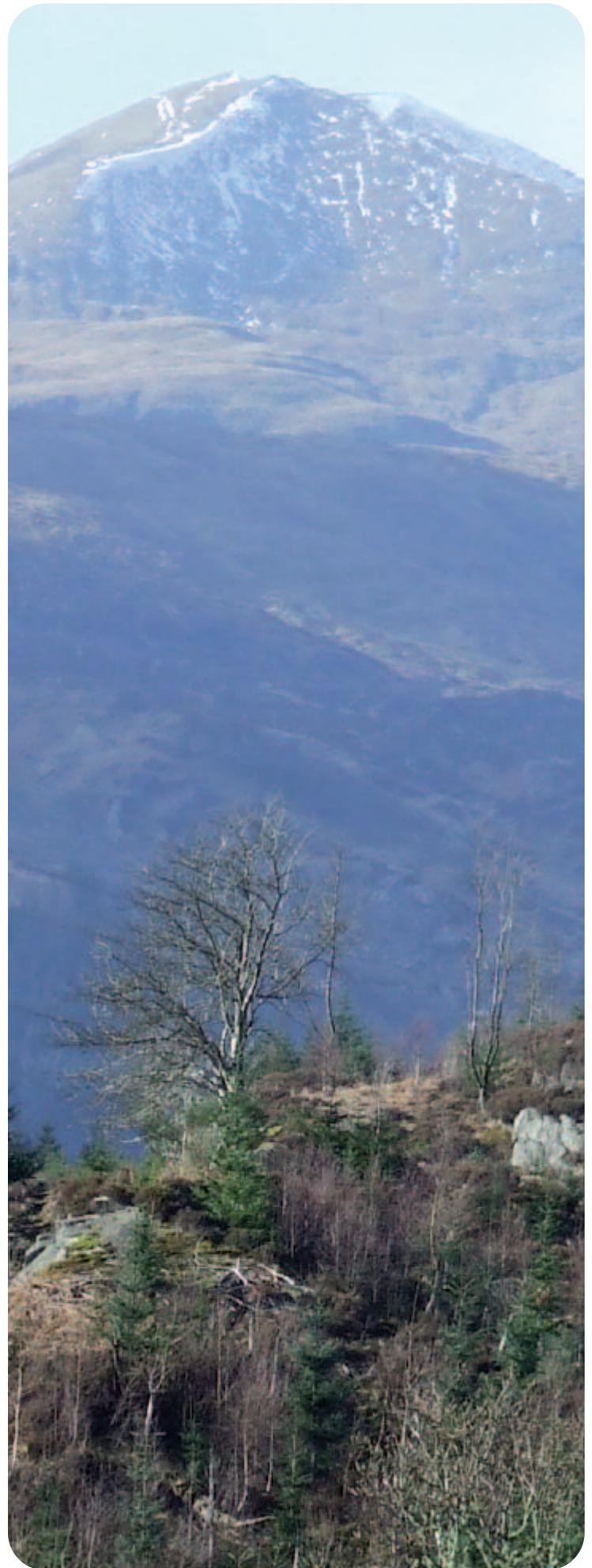
Formal evaluation is carried out by SQA and involves internal and external verification. To date this has proved to have been a very positive and rewarding experience for all involved.

Informally, staff, parents, employers and pupils all consider this course to be a worthwhile experience while the pupils have definitely shown new signs of maturity, a willingness to take on responsibilities and delight in working as part of a team.



“Pupils are enjoying every minute. They are highly motivated and see value in the skills they are acquiring to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors”

View from the school



Future Delivery Plans

It is thought that there is an opportunity for pupils to progress into the Scottish Progression Award in S5 and S6. These units would, the school believes, benefit pupils wishing to go on to study Vet Medicine, Ecology or Land Management courses at university or pupils wishing to follow SVQ, HNC and HND courses at a specialist land-based college.

The present S3 group is progressing to S4 to follow the Animal or Crop production units, but a new S3 group is not coming through next session as the school plans to review the course as a whole before any decisions can be made. The challenges to be faced will be on the staffing and funding fronts.

Advice

The school believes the course offers pupils a wonderful opportunity to experience practical skills in real work situations and to reconnect them with their environment as they learn about the value and importance of conservation and other matters.

Significantly, the course has helped to form strengthening relationships with employers in the local community.

“My son’s attitude to school has changed. I could never get him up for school, but now he is really keen when he has Rural Studies – he really looks forward to working outside and doing practical things”

View from a parent

