

Skills for Work CASE STUDY

Rural Skills Intermediate 1

Through its Rural Skills Academy, Oatridge College successfully ran the Skills for Work Rural Skills Intermediate 1 for three groups of adult returners in partnership with Edinburgh based charity, Access to Industry.



Rationale

ESF funding was accessed to create a new programme of learning for young adults and adult returners. The target group has a range of social and personal backgrounds which precluded them from mainstream training, some never previously achieving any qualifications.

Seeking a recognised qualification that provides an introduction to the landbased sector and an achievable and non-threatening reintroduction to learning, Skills for Work Rural Skills Intermediate 1 was the clear choice.

The course satisfied all the criteria and with support materials and NABs readily available it reduces the delivery team workload and enabled a quick start.

“ From being the group I was most anxious about teaching the Environment RSA group became my favourite; they were literally a breath of fresh air – working outside with a group of interesting, varied and cheerful people ”

S Reay, Lecturer in Environment and Countryside Management





Partnership Arrangements

Working together on the Rural Skills Academy was a natural progression of the relationship between Oatridge College and Access to Industry. Development meetings and a service level agreement clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of both partners. Access to Industry took responsibility for the initial recruitment of learners. Oatridge College is responsible for the delivery, assessment and management of the programme. Both partners are involved in the guidance and support of learners.

“The course was better than we expected and it has opened up new opportunities for us that we never knew about”

View from learner

Delivery Approaches

Leaflets were distributed to a wide range of client support agencies across South East Scotland to encourage applications through an on-line system. Access to Industry initially screened applicants. Potential learners were invited to visit the college to tour the campus, have lunch and be interviewed individually. To date 40 learners have been interviewed for the Rural Skills Academy through this process. Those not successful were placed on a reserve list for future programmes.

The programme is offered over a 12 week block with attendance for 3 days per week. Days commence at 10.30 and finish at 15.45. Learners are provided with free transport to and from the college from four locations, lunch vouchers and personal protection equipment. The Rural Skills Units are delivered at the college in dedicated areas. To reflect personal interest, the college provides two routes of Rural Skills study – one based on landscape gardening and the other based on environmental/forestry studies. The groups appreciated having ownership of an area of ground to develop as a garden, a vegetable cropping area or a wildlife garden. Maximum use was made of the college estate for practical activities. Visits to farms, farriers, countryside parks, builders' merchants, sawmills and plant growers ensure learners are exposed to the widest range of rural enterprises and occupations.

Initially additional part-time staff were engaged to deliver the programme. During the course full-time staff joined the delivery team. To date nine permanent staff have contributed to delivery.

Selective use is made of the comprehensive support materials. Where needed materials are adapted to suit learning needs.

In all cases assessment is carried out using National Assessment Bank materials.

Each learner, in conjunction with the course tutor, developed an agreed Individual Learning Plan which identified the aims of the learner, additional support requirements and actions for core skills development.

The main challenges related to attendance and individual financial circumstances. The college has to ensure learners could connect with transport and staff are empathetic to individual circumstances.

Employability Skills

In addition to the five core units, two hours per week are allocated for group discussions and individual support. Access to Industry provides on-going support and delivers an additional programme of developing personal effectiveness and college staff provided personal and group guidance.

The Employability Unit is allocated to one member of staff to coordinate for each group of learners. All delivering staff ensure learners complete risk assessments throughout activities and consider employability issues during each unit. The allocated staff member works with individuals and lecturers to assess the development of employability skills and feeds back any recommendations to the individuals and the course team. Non-achievement of the employability unit was largely due to poor attendance rather than any other factor. During the programme learners became aware of their own attitudes and actions, the need to consider their employability skills and the needs of employers. Having discussions with employers as part of the learning process was instrumental in the development of these skills.

“ I find teaching in the Rural Skills Academy a completely rewarding experience. Every RSA student brings their own set of challenges to the course and working through them is all part of the 3 month adventure that is Rural Skills ”

Jo Grant, Lecturer in Rural Skills

Centre Evaluation

Informal feedback was gathered weekly. Individual progress was assessed by the individual, the course tutor and the Access to Industry project officer. Formal evaluation was undertaken post induction, mid programme and pre-exit using standard college evaluation procedures.

Learners complete a post-induction questionnaire covering recruitment, interview and induction procedures for the first week at college. Feedback from all groups has been very satisfactory reflecting the benefits of the planned and agreed approach by the partners.

Mid course evaluations chart individual student progress against their learning plan and are used to counsel learners on future plans and options. Final evaluations are carried out during the last week of attendance using the college's learning and teaching evaluation materials.

22 learners achieved the Group Award (over 60% of learners) and over 70% of learners achieved one or more Units, with student retention averaging over 80%. Significantly, out of the 19 students who completed the last programme, 15 (80%) are continuing their studies at Oatridge College on the "Enterprising in the Environment" programme.

“ It's been the first time I've had the chance to learn something if I'm honest. A good balance of practical and theory ”

View from learner - Environment



Future Delivery Plans

The Rural Skills Academy is now a successfully established route for the target learner group and is becoming increasingly known within their support networks. Future delivery plans are to run the Skills for Work programme for one group of learners per term. Whilst progression to National Qualification courses has been achieved by a number of learners, the Land Use department has introduced a pre-certificate level programme to provide a more gradual progression route for some learners.

Progression from the programme delivered during the autumn block is particularly challenging for learners who face waiting until the following autumn for entry to full-time courses. To solve this issue Oatridge College has worked with West Lothian College, Jewel and Esk and Forth Valley Colleges to provide routes for January start programmes and it is hoped that increasingly learners will move to other colleges to continue their studies at this time of year.

In conjunction with West Lothian Literacies Partnership, who have sponsored the development and delivery of a new programme – “Enterprising in the Environment” 15 RSA students have been able to progress from the autumn block Rural Skills to this one day per week accredited programme of study. It aims to develop the enterprise and personal development of individuals through environment based activities.

The Rural Skills Academy has been created to provide a route for disadvantaged people. In addition Oatridge College delivers the SfW Rural Skills in partnership with a range of local and distant schools.



Advice

- Planning well in advance works best
- Work in partnership with others
- Agree roles and responsibilities expected of each partner.

“What’s good about the Rural Skills award is that it can be used as an introduction not only to land-based skills, but can be used to encourage people back into the education and training sector. Seeing people develop as individuals and learners is just so personally rewarding”

A Kitchen, Head of Department of Land Use

