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L A N D B A S E D



P A R T N E R S H I P S
working together - a partnership approach to NVQs

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LANDBASED

Growing Together: Landbased Occupations In Partnership

The background

The landbased sector in Northern Ireland encompasses the agriculture and food producers along with conservation and countryside specialists. This sector is a cornerstone of the Northern Ireland economy and represents a significant workforce made up of full-time, part-time and volunteer workers.

This sector, like others, needs to have a competent and qualified workforce. Before forming the partnership each individual industry within the sector developed its own approaches to identifying training and qualification needs. As a result opportunities to influence the structure and content of occupational standards and qualifications were not always taken up.

This led to some concerns that occupational qualifications were not seen as relevant to the Northern Ireland industry and the uptake was reflecting this.

In 1997 the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Northern Ireland (DARD) conducted a survey of the vocational qualifications among Northern Ireland's Family Farm Workforce. The survey showed that relatively small proportions of the family workforce had recognised vocational qualifications at the various levels. It clearly identified a potential area for future development.

DARD is responsible for the administration of the national economic support for the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland and the implementation of EU policies, including price support and the payment of production subsidies and capital grants to farmers.

The responsibility for the development of occupational standards for the landbased sector rests with Lantra, the National Training Organisation (NTO). One of Lantra's objectives is, *'to improve competitiveness in the industry.'*

To help achieve this Lantra wanted to understand the needs of employers in Northern Ireland and

ensure that the proposed qualifications would underpin future developments within the industry.

During discussions between Lantra and DARD regarding qualifications and occupational standards the need for a Northern Ireland group or forum was identified. It was recognised that such a forum would be able to respond collectively to consultations and developments in relation to the occupational standards and qualifications being developed within the landbased sector.

DARD and Lantra agreed to contact all the recognised industry representatives and invited them to a meeting to discuss the possibility of such a partnership. The initial meeting was well attended and the industry representatives present saw the partnership as a positive step forward.

An advisory group was developed and its purpose was identified as *'To represent and champion businesses and individuals engaged within the sector in Northern Ireland and actively support and promote the*

work of Lantra in the achievement of its objectives.' The group was to be known as the Northern Ireland Landbased Sectors NTO Forum.

The partnership

If the forum was to succeed it needed enthusiastic members to help champion education, training and business development within the sector.

'The aim will be to ensure a strongly representative group that can both represent the interests of an individual industry and the landbased sector as a whole.'

It was envisaged that these members would normally be identified through their active involvement in development programmes and would be recognised as movers and shakers by those in the sector.

The forum that finally came together to form the partnership draws its membership from the individual bodies identified below:

- Ulster Farmers Union
- Northern Ireland Agriculture Producers Association
- Association of Landscape Contractors
- Greenkeepers Association
- Fencing
- British Association of Shooting and Conservation
- Northern Ireland Agriculture Machinery Dealers Association
- Floristry
- Conservation Volunteers
- The National Trust
- The Woodland Trust
- Northern Ireland Seafood Ltd (farmed fish)
- Environment and Heritage Service, DOE
- Lantra
- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

- Greenmount College of Agriculture and Horticulture
- Enniskillen College.

There are also two bodies with observer status:

- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Training & Employment Agency.

The partnership approach

The structure of the forum is informal in the sense that it does not carry any statutory responsibilities. However, members of the forum are accountable in a general sense to individuals and businesses which they represent from within the sector.

In addition to attending formal quarterly meetings members are involved in national focus groups working on projects and initiatives to further the work of Lantra within Northern Ireland.

They are also required to meet with representatives of government departments and agencies, and participate in events to promote the work of Lantra within their particular industry or as a whole.

Representatives on the forum agreed to adopt draft terms of reference as a starting point. This approach was taken to ensure that they reviewed their activities and focus before they would finalise the areas they were targeting.

The work of the partnership

The draft terms of reference for the partnership contain objectives set out against eight bullet points. These identify the roles of advising on issues relating to vocational

education/ training and business development issues, participation in consultations, representation of the individual sectors, supporting the work of Lantra industry groups, to name a few.

The early meetings provided the forum with the opportunity to meet representatives from Lantra who explained the systems within which Lantra operated.

At the inaugural meeting held in March 2000, in reply to a question on how could Northern Ireland become involved in the current review of NVOs, a Lantra representative requested names of individuals from interested industry groupings who could be involved in the consultative process.

The benefits of partnership

Consultation has been ongoing and a number of representatives have taken part in working groups with Lantra in England.

The forum has been working closely with the Department of Employment and Learning on the development of frameworks for the Modern Apprenticeships and Traineeships for the sector. A number of frameworks have now been agreed and now carry the words:

'The content of this Traineeship Framework has been adapted by the Training & Employment Agency from the Lantra Foundation MA in consultation with Lantra NI Advisory Group.'

Already it would appear that this partnership has demonstrated its value to the Landbased sector in Northern Ireland.