

OUTSTANDING TRAINING SUCCESS

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by Sue Bradbury

It isn't unusual for students at HMS Raleigh near Torpoint to ask their tutors if they can have the key to a classroom so they can put in some extra study. Whilst some educational providers might struggle to get their pupils' interest, staff at HMS Raleigh's Apprenticeship Department are in the happy position of being sought out by men and women only too willing to learn.

HMS Raleigh positively buzzes with educational verve. Each year, approximately 2500 trainees go through the Navy's rigorous nine week basic training course at the base and a further 350 stay on to do an Apprenticeship there. These are the people who are going on to be logisticians who will specialise in catering services, supply chain and personnel administration. Vocational training for other specialist trades is carried out elsewhere.

Additionally, the learndirect centre at HMS Raleigh, which caters for a diverse range of educational needs from people wanting to do extra GCSEs to those wanting to do an ICT qualification, has recently been named the best performing Royal Navy and Royal Marine Centre for 2007. The centre is managed by staff employed by Flagship Training – a private company which has a unique partnering agreement with the Royal Navy.

In the last five years, Raleigh has seen a huge improvement in its educational success rates. In 2002/03, just over 30% of recruits achieved Apprenticeships. That figure rose to nearly 50% in 2003\04, over 70% in 2004\05, 85% in 2005\06 and a whopping 91% last year. So what has happened to change things around so dramatically?

The answer, it seems, is a change of mindset, a real sense of teamwork and new training facilities funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

Almost all of the HMS Raleigh-based Apprenticeship civilian staff are former RN personnel – a distinct advantage since they are able to teach the new recruits from a standpoint of real experience and understanding. Each key skills tutor has attained teaching qualifications and attended regular Continuing Professional Development courses. The result, according to Apprenticeship Co-ordinator Phil Elkins, is a close-knit team of teachers who are passionate about their work.

‘We understand the danger of stagnation and complacency so we are constantly developing our training in line with the needs of the fleet,’ he said. ‘Most of us have done the jobs we are now teaching others to do so we are able to speak from both knowledge and experience. Whilst that could lead to a fixed idea of what our trainees need to learn, we are careful to continually review their performance at sea so that any perceived weaknesses in their training programme are sorted out for the next batch of recruits.’

The trainees themselves have a diverse range of ages and backgrounds. Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) recruits can be up to 54 years old and a significant percentage of Commonwealth personnel ensures a broad cultural mix that the tutors say is very beneficial. Literacy and numeracy skills of new recruits are variable but making learning job-related makes all the difference to a trainee’s attainment according to Key Skills tutor Babs Kemp, a former RN writer.

‘The best part of my job is when a student asks why maths wasn’t taught like this at school,’ she said. ‘I teach recruits who are training to become logisticians specialising in the supply chain and most of them think they can’t do maths until I show them why they need to be able to do things like equations. Everything is set in the context of the work they are going to do and that provides a real sense of purpose.’

Charlie Runkee was an RN chef for 13 years before he had to retire on medical grounds. Now he helps teach the caterers of the future.

‘We start off by getting the trainees to design a menu which not only gets them thinking about meals from a culinary perspective but also requires ICT and literacy skills,’ he said. ‘From there they have to give a written explanation of the method used to create a main course dish, cost it, produce a weekly food plan, keep temperature records and produce charts, carry out a food hazard analysis and, finally, at the end of their course, they have to give a powerpoint presentation on a food subject of their choice. After that, if they have achieved everything they need to achieve, they go into one of our galley simulators for two months to learn the practical skills that provide realistic preparation for life and work onboard ship.’

The Learning and Skills Council has provided funds for the mock-up galleys, storerooms and other training facilities that are an essential part of HMS Raleigh's education complex.

'Our job is to make sure that learning providers like HMS Raleigh take advantage of the funding that is on offer,' said Karen Griffiths, Regional Skills Development Manager in Skills for Life. 'The instructors have honed an excellent approach to learning programmes over the last few years which ensures that every learner has his or her personal needs continually assessed from the start of basic training. It is a holistic assessment which looks at every aspect of an individual's progress, including in English and maths, and its success lies in the fact that it's both thorough and ongoing.'

Alex Masztalerz, 17, from Saltash, is in the tenth week of his catering services course. With 16 weeks left of training before he goes to sea, he has already achieved his food hygiene and health and safety certificates – qualifications that, like the NVQ level 2 that he is now aiming for – will stand him in very good stead should he ever decide to return to 'civvy street'.

'Joining the Navy was the best thing I ever did,' he said. 'I like cooking and I like the fact that I'm getting paid to get qualified. Our course covers all aspects of catering and we take theory and practical exams after everything we do. I've passed everything so far.'

Thirty year old Sheldon White, from Weymouth, is training to be an RFA chef. He already has NVQ level 2 and 3 qualifications in catering but dyslexia and weak numeracy skills mean that he is having extra lessons to help him get through the course.

'I need maths to get where I want to go and thanks to the instructors here I'm getting better,' he said. 'I'd never done much with computers before but now I get the chance to use them a lot. At the moment I'm preparing a powerpoint presentation about sushi.'

Helping students achieve literacy and numeracy skills is the job of tutor Paula Bourne. Unlike most of her colleagues, her background is in adult education rather than the RN.

'We do a lot of interactive activities like punctuating a document on the white board,' she said. 'It's important to create the right environment so we often have music playing in class. I teach reading, writing and ICT skills by relating them to the jobs the trainees are going to do. They have to pass a test so we do lots of practices. Our success rate is 95%.'

Commander Phil Waterhouse is the man in charge of the Defence Maritime Logistics School at HMS Raleigh. Understandably proud of the school's outstanding achievement rates, he says it is the whole team approach to delivering education at the base which has earned it its outstanding reputation.

'The single most important person here is the instructor so we make sure they are very well prepared for the job,' he said. 'We also prioritise communication – making sure that everyone works together towards the common goal of producing well trained recruits who have all the skills necessary to perform their jobs effectively at sea.

'The fact that those recruits also gain qualifications that are readily transferable to civilian life is a huge additional benefit – not just for them but for future employers too.'

Photos (by Bernie Pettersen)

014 Key Skills Tutor Babs Kemp

018 Training and Development Officer Charlie Runkee

026 Chief Petty Officer Jason Simmons who is studying for a GCSE in English and Commerce

048 L to R: Apprenticeship Co-ordinator Phil Elkins, Commander Phil Waterhouse, Regional Skills Development Manager Karen Griffiths and Apprenticeship Training and Development Officer Stephen Holmes

088 Trainee chef Alex Masztalerz, 17, from Saltash

103 Leading Chef Mark Hunter teaches trainee Aron Slade, 20, from Sussex, how to make chocolate éclairs

146 Key Skills Tutor Paula Bourne with one of her classes