

Ragley Hall Meats Alcester, Worcester

When you're selling traditionally-reared meat from the aristocratic seat of the Marquess and Marchioness of Hertford, only the highest of standards will do.

Which is why Vanda Cookes, Head Chef at Ragley Estate Meats in Alcester, Worcestershire, turned to a college 40 miles away in Gloucestershire to train her butchery staff.

"We couldn't find any training in the area for butchery," she says. "We were getting to the stage where we thought we wouldn't be able to have an apprenticeship at all. Then we got in touch with Hartpury College. They've been absolutely fantastic. They offer such a variety of different courses within the butchery trade that our staff can do – and they cover everything in the process from the abattoir, to the butchery, to retail and sales."

Ragley's relationship with Hartpury began with an apprenticeship in butchery and has led to an NVQ in butchery for another student as well as short courses in first aid, knife skills, and food safety. They're also training Ragley's head butcher to become an in-house assessor.

"They offer such a variety of different courses within the butchery trade"

"The training has given our apprentice a lot of confidence. He used to be reserved and would shy away from taking responsibility, but now he's keen to have a go. It's given him the confidence to say he's being trained by a pro and worth his salt.

"He is no longer reluctant to cut up meat in front of our customers, he's more confident with them, and he can give them a lot more information, which is ideal as we do like our customers to come in and ask us about meat. He came to us as a driver and odd-job man who wasn't at all interested in butchery. Then we offered him this training and he hasn't looked back."

Vanda says Hartpury's involvement is already proving a great benefit to Ragley Estate Meats, and she'll be using the training opportunities they offer to ensure she can fill vacancies that arise as her current staff are promoted.

"The training was not only less expensive but very well done"

She says the flexibility of Hartpury's tutors has made a significant difference to her busy operation.

"There have been times when we were very busy but we could ring them up and ask them to rearrange the training for another day. They've been so helpful, they really have, and the training was not only less expensive but very well done. You can go on courses elsewhere and have a tutor who doesn't get the message across well at all.

"I would recommend Hartpury's training to anyone in the butchery trade. It's well worth it and our apprentice is enjoying every minute of it."

