



Sherborne Girls Dorset

One of England's finest independent boarding schools has learnt lessons from bringing in a further education college to train its management and catering staff.

And the lessons learnt by Sherborne Girls have all been positive, according to its Personnel Manager, Heather Cousins.

The first lesson was that it's possible to have your staff trained even when, as is inevitable at a boarding school, the staff are needed on site and can't spend time away at college.

“Communications with the college have been superb, the cost was very competitive, and we felt it was good value for money”

The second was that having managers trained as a group improves their understanding of each other's roles and helps them build a strong and valuable rapport.

The third was that staff offered the chance of training feel better about themselves and their prospects, and find a renewed sense of enthusiasm for their work.

“We were so pleased with the support we had from Somerset College,” says Heather. “We started with a healthy eating and nutrition Level 2 NVQ for eight cooks because we wanted to introduce a healthy eating programme for the school. They delivered it as a distance learning course and the trainer only

had to come in twice – at the beginning and the end. He was always at the end of the phone, and our staff could ring him up at any time. The feedback from the people on the course was superb. It underpinned all the knowledge we'd been trying to give them – and, suddenly, it all made sense.”

The school arranged further training for assistant cooks, cooking assistants and assistant house mistresses who helped prepare menus and wanted to learn more about healthy eating and nutrition.

“Everyone got through, everyone enjoyed it, and many of them did it in their own time,” says Heather.

“We also had a gap in our training for assistant house mistresses and a couple of other people who were in junior management positions but didn't have a lot of management experience, so the college arranged certified modules in people management, people skills and assertiveness for us. Everyone who did it said it was fantastic. They hadn't had any training like that before. The trainers brought it to life and the module content was put together in a way that made the people on the course build rapport as a group.

“The whole group learned by hearing about the experience of other people from different parts of the school and they all gained a great deal from it.

“I knew it would be good for them all to work together but I didn't realise how beneficial it was going to be. Several of them have gone on to do a Level 3 NVQ in management.”

Heather says Somerset College's attitude to training and the way it was delivered made all the difference.

“The modules were developed specifically for us. I talked it through with the trainers and said exactly what we were looking for, and they e-mailed me the proposals. I didn't need to change a thing. With eight of the 12 on the course, we couldn't have sent them away en masse to the college because they're line managers in a boarding school and have to be there. We just couldn't have done it. And if we had sent them separately, there would not have been the rapport in the group. That was a real bonus for us.”

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