

Growing Jobs – Case Studies

Working with Schools

An issue that concerns many interviewees is the apparent lack of communication between Schools and Horticulture. The industry has traditionally not been perceived as being as highly efficient and technical as it has now become.

Engaging the education sector is crucial if we are to attract a skilled and motivated workforce.

One company that has done this successfully is Hillier Nursery – a leading supplier of plants to the Horticultural industry throughout the UK which runs its own chain of 14 garden centres.



The Mountbatten School

When The Mountbatten School in Romsey asked for help in delivering a new course Hillier were not only happy to help, but went on to devise a programme of study 'Growing with Hillier'.

Diana McDonnell, Mountbatten's Deputy Head had originally sought work placements for one day a week for students taking a course in 'Land and Environment'. Placements were found at a variety of places, tailored to individual interests. These included farming, fishing, practical estate skills and horticulture. Hillier agreed to an initial placement for two students. What followed had a major impact on the future of nine students.

Diana approached Emma Fell, a section leader at Hillier, about the assessment required for the course. Emma, who is passionate about Horticulture, immediately set about ensuring the development of a programme that would address all the criteria for assessment. What evolved was the 'Growing with Hillier' course covering two units: 'Horticulture' and 'Plants and soil'.

Two groups of students followed the course – a Saturday group who were paid for working at the nursery and a Thursday group.

Diana said: 'The course has been really powerful in building the children's commitment and self esteem. Most of the group have ended up with apprenticeships or college placements in the land based industry of their choice. Thanks to Hillier, they have been able to complete sufficient vocational units to qualify for the diploma worth four GCSEs rather than the certificate equivalent to two.'

Action Points – What do you do well?

What could you improve?

What will you do next?

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How the new qualifications framework helps

The new Qualifications and Credits Framework means an assessment of evidence that the children meet the course criteria.

The Land and Environment qualification meant that the children had to:

1. Identify a range of plants
2. Prepare media for planting in open ground and in a container
3. Carry out practical planting and maintenance activities
4. Carry out practical nursery and glasshouse tasks.
5. Identify internal and external plant structures and the role they have in plant growth
6. Identify key characteristics of soils
7. Prepare soil for planting and know how to cultivate it for best results.
8. Describe how light and nutrients are important for plant growth.

Edexcel's regional quality manager for Southern England met Diana and Emma at Hillier to examine the programme. In a report she wrote 'These learners have had a sound experience and have more than covered the requirements at level one. In fact I recommended that Jack Stride could be assessed against the units at level two'.

The Qualifications and Credits Framework - QCF

Working with schools requires taking time out to understand how the current awards system operates under the new Qualification and Credit Framework.

Fundamentally there are 3 types of award.

These are called awards, certificates and diplomas depending on how much content there is and they have a level attached which relates to difficulty. For example Level 4 is a foundation degree (equivalent to first year undergraduate in old money with level 3 representing A levels) Levels 1 and 2 which we are discussing here are equivalent to a D pass or a C pass and above at GCSE respectively. So Jack got 4 GCSEs at better than C Grade

An award has up to 12 transferable 10 hour credits while a diploma will involve more than 37 credits. [A duffer's guide can be found here](#)

Companies that want to work with schools need to know how what you do maps to an award or certificate in an environmental or biological subject. Then you can start to connect as you contribute to the school's goals.

Action Points – What do you do well? What could you improve? What will you do next?

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Emma had already recognised Jack’s potential. He was not afraid of hard physical work, of getting wet and dirty, or of having a go at anything new. In the same way that she had approached the level one course, Emma developed a programme for assessment at level two in Horticulture. Jack has subsequently been offered an apprenticeship at Hillier, starting in July.

How it works

The School has a lot of latitude in how it organises these courses particularly in the balance between traditional taught materials and the kind of work placement activity carried out by Hillier.

The course criteria set out what students have to know or be able to do. It’s then up to the school to devise a mechanism combining taught modules with the necessary assessment and verification for practical work.

The Growing with Hillier course provides an effective induction into Health and Safety and supplies the students with a tee shirt and workbook covering the following activities:

1. Lifting
2. Potting
3. Clearing and Recycling
4. Incoming stock management
5. Weeding
6. Plant Husbandry including watering and pests and diseases

The schools in this area all timetable the same day each week for vocational courses, many of which are delivered in local colleges

In a year group of 284, roughly 40 Mountbatten students have a vocational day each week. If the Growers could put forward a mechanism to work within the system using the flexibility that’s there, then initiatives like this can be rolled out on a wider scale.

If we can find a way to support such projects by funding staff time, we can help develop the next generation of nursery staff and ensure continued success for Horticulture in the UK.



Jack Stride- Hillier Apprentice to be

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Hillier approach to training & iIP



This project fits in well with Hillier general approach to education and training

Hillier have a long term commitment to Investors in People and have found that it has a major effect on both the skills base and motivation of the staff. It has developed a real alignment within the company.

Following the iIP standard makes sure management articulates company goals in ways that allow the staff to engage with the vision for the company and helps them to focus on developing value to the customer.

The company has its own Dale Carnegie accredited trainer and its own training facility which it uses to run courses, often jointly with other local growers.

The company focuses on first time training for supervisors and junior staff – traditionally an area in which it's hard to find good quality training – with a course called MYMO –

Manage Yourself – Manage Others which deals with time management and communication skills particularly how to address standard issues of conflict resolution, training the trainer, listening and motivation.



MYMO in action

The course runs as a full version for supervisors and a “pocket” version for all staff which is now extremely popular with the staff and has delivered a great deal in terms of increased motivation and performance.

This is a great example of how to build a sustainable world class workforce. If you are interested in more details on the project contact Emma Fell at Hillier.

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