

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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Improve collaborative project with Higher Education in Wales

Introduction:

Improve has worked collaboratively with the HE Sector in Wales and has been successful in attracting a £250k fund to develop a 'Food Science Conversion Programme' at Masters level and other industry specific short courses. This will be developed in partnership between the University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC), The University of Glamorgan, Aberystwyth University, Coleg Menai, Food Centre Wales and Improve (the food and drink sector skills council). A press release has

been issued and a copy is attached for information - see annex 1.

Issues:

The generic food training currently available does not meet industry requirements in terms of up-skilling the current work force to meet the needs of the retail sector and the consumer. Training and education needs to be employer led and focus on nurturing skills that are both fit for purpose now and in the future.

The Welsh food industry is in desperate need of food technology and science training and education. UWIC has been the focal point for research on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government to determine areas for improvement in education and training needs of the food industry. The aim is for the project partners to work collaboratively to gain recognition as an Improve Academy. It is predicted by 2010 there will be 25 Academies and 200 registered training providers working across the UK.

In May 2007 the Northern Food Foundation was established in England to attract new entrants into the food industry by sponsoring 30 students through their degree courses at Leeds, Nottingham and Reading. Currently no such incentive scheme operates in Wales. By working with employers we aim to introduce a bursary scheme for food science students in Wales.

This project will focus on how the HE sector, by working in collaboration with Improve, FE institutions and industry partners, can ensure it delivers the training and education needs of the Welsh food and drink manufacturing sector in locations across Wales and attract new entrants into the industry. This project will also allow project partners access to the expertise and facilities of the Food Industry Centre in addition to developing closer working between academic partners across Wales.

Solution:

This collaborative approach will help to implement Improve's Sector Skills Agreement in Wales through partnership between the Food Industry Centre, Welsh HEIs and FE colleges, Improve and employers. In particular this project will increase the supply of Food Science Technologists into the sector, enhance the relationship between industry and educators / training providers and raise the quality and availability of specialist food industry training across Wales.

Outcomes:

A 'Food Industry Skills Strategy Group' for Wales has been established with representatives from Improve, project delivery partners and food industry employers. This group will oversee the project; contribute to identify training needs & solutions and encourage employer participation in the skills agenda.

This project has four broad objectives which are outlined below.

Objective 1

: Increase the supply of graduates into the food and drink manufacturing sector

Develop and deliver a masters level food science and technology conversion course for science graduates in collaboration with HE / FE partners. This will incorporate a series of core modules in Food Technologies and work streams to include:

- Agriculture
- Retail
- Meat Technology
- Food Safety
- Dairy
- Technical Management
- Quality Systems
- Food Packaging
- Bakery and Confectionary
- New Product Development

The Wales Skills Strategy Group will discuss and determine the role of HE / FE partners in developing and delivering these modules. This collaborative approach will ensure that delivery can take place across Wales.

Increase the number of students onto Food Technology undergraduate / postgraduate courses by working with university Careers Service offices.

Develop a bursary scheme in association with employers and the Wales Skills Strategy group to attract students into enrolling on food science undergraduate courses and the Masters Food Science and Technology conversion course.

Improve links between Improve and university careers services and widening access activities to attract school leavers and graduates onto undergraduate and conversion food science courses

Objective 2:

Identify the needs of the Welsh Food and Drink Manufacturing workforce and enhance the relationship between industry and educators / training providers.

Liaise with key food processors in the Principality to determine training needs, numbers of staff requiring training and costs in order to establish industry commitment to fund training and bursaries.

Review the potential for developing foundation degrees in the food and drink manufacturing sector in Wales

Objective 3

: Develop and deliver high quality training / education initiatives to upskill the Welsh food and drink manufacturing sector across Wales.

Following the research undertaken under 'Objective 2' (above) a range of new short courses will be developed. UWIC already offers a range of food hygiene and bespoke courses. It is proposed that 6 additional specialist courses will be developed to reflect specialist areas such as baking and confectionery, quality systems, packaging and new product development. Also the demand for developing and delivering an NVQ in Baking and Confectionary will be explored.

An annual programme of food industry training courses to be delivered at the Food Industry Centre and partner institutions across Wales will be established. The providers will also offer the opportunity, where practical, to deliver bespoke / accredited training courses on company premises.

Objective 4

: Co-ordinate project activity between partners and plan for future developments.

A new role - Food Industry Skills Co-ordinator - has been created to co-ordinate the development of the conversion courses, bursary scheme, short courses and related business / marketing planning. This role is based within the Food Industry Centre at UWIC and provides regular project updates to the Food Industry Skills Strategy Group. This role can generate additional income for all delivery partners through the delivery of the conversion course, short course and consultancy. It is believed that the position can be extended beyond August 2010 provided it can demonstrate sufficient 'value-added' to the industry.

The Food Industry Skills Strategy Group will help develop the business case for a Food & Drink Skills Academy Wales to be located at the Food Industry Centre with the capability to deliver training interventions across Wales and to the rest of the UK through the Improve Food Academy Network.

Annex 1

Press Release - Welsh Business/Education Correspondents

Wales leads the way in food science

Science graduates are being offered a stepping stone towards high-flying careers in the food and drink industry thanks to new courses being launched in Wales.

The Food Science and Technology conversion course at Masters level is being developed as a result of a partnership between the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC), the University of Glamorgan, Aberystwyth University, Coleg Menai, Food Centre Wales and the food and drink sector skills council, Improve. The partnership attracted £250,000 of funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to develop and run the new conversion course and other industry specific short courses.

The courses are aimed at boosting the flagging numbers of qualified food scientists working in Wales' £9 billion food manufacturing industry. Wales is the first of the UK nations to introduce such a scheme in response to what is becoming a critical problem in all regions.

Research carried out by Improve has revealed that one in five employers in the sector in Wales are struggling to fill vacancies for food scientists, despite the top positions in the industry offering salaries of up to £65,000.

Huw Rees, Improve's operations manager for Wales, said: "Food scientists and technologists are the people who invent new products

and come up with faster, more efficient methods of production. They play a central role in food and drink manufacture, but with the current shortages, many companies have to cover vital food safety and hygiene functions at the expense of new product development and innovation. For some, this means productivity and profitability is suffering.

"This project has resulted directly from the Sector Skills Agreement Improve drew up in close consultation with food and drink companies in Wales. Employers have been crying out for a pro-active means of encouraging more talented young science graduates into the industry. These courses will allow anyone with a degree in a science subject to achieve an accredited food science qualification in preparation for a career in the industry."

The project will also involve working with the Food Industry to create a bursary scheme for food science-related degrees at Welsh universities. The newly-formed Wales Food Skills Strategy Group in charge of the scheme is also working on the development of short courses in specialist areas such as baking, confectionery and new product development to be made available through the partner universities, colleges and other Further Education institutions across Wales.

Helen Taylor, who is leading the project at UWIC, said: "Food science and technology has been a neglected subject area in the past and that is now causing problems for the food industry.

"A lot of time and money is being invested in turning the situation around. The fact that we are working in such close collaboration with our fellow universities in Glamorgan, Aberystwyth and Bangor as well as colleges and FE institutions shows that there is a real desire to get this right all across Wales, and offer a timely boost to our food industry."

Ends