

Student Support Initiative Award 2016

- 1) Outline the project or initiative and what makes it innovative and inspiring (300 words)

Tailored student support from NAFC Marine Centre UHI - what we can do for our students.

In November 2014 as part of the SDS *Learning Through Work* week events, NAFC staff attended all secondary schools in Shetland. At one of the more remote rural (island) schools we met a young man who was following a tailored education plan in his 5th year.

This student had complex needs affecting his cognitive, language, motor and social development, language-development difficulties, severe Dyslexia (reader & scribe in class where required), and specific unnamed difficulties resulting in memory problems (retention and recall, more marked in verbal rather than visual areas), and required repetition and practical examples to help him learn. He also had difficulty with social interactions and activities; he was very shy speaking to people, connected to memory problems and difficulty recalling names/words.

The student had an interest aquaculture (fish farming) and had enjoyed work experience on a local salmon farm which had led to weekend and holiday work. This work experience had helped him develop his numeracy skills through practical usage (as opposed to classroom-based theory).

NAFC was asked to consider whether this student could be supported to undertake elements of the National Progression Award (NPA) in Aquaculture that were within his capabilities. This would require him to attend classes at the NAFC Marine Centre in Scalloway which was a daunting prospect for the student. He had never previously travelled outside his home island by himself, and travel to NAFC would require an extended and complex journey, including two ferry crossings.

From the outset it was hoped that the student could be supported – through a multi-agency collaboration involving his parents, his school, SDS, NAFC and his employer – to develop as an individual and to gain a useful qualification that would help him secure employment in the industry he had chosen.

291 words

- 2) Detail how the project or initiative was delivered, from the planning stage through to its successful conclusion (300 words) Include details of timing and funding

Between November 2014 and March 2015 the student completed the Work Experience unit of the NPA and worked through the North European Aquaculture unit at his school with support from his teachers, and covered the Basic Seamanship unit while on work experience. Although his school could deliver much of the course content they were not SQA approved for the full award so he was enrolled by NAFC and came under the supervision and guidance of the Centre's aquaculture lecturer.

To complete the final elements of the training it was necessary for the student to attend the NAFC Marine Centre in Scalloway. The student was initially very resistant to attending NAFC, but following an initial escorted visit to the campus in March 2015 which allowed him to visualise and gain a sense of what would be involved he became more amenable. Transport arrangements were put in place involving the student's parents and members of NAFC staff.

By June 2015 the student was fully engaged in his classes at NAFC and making good progress. All the required units had been covered with additional time spent on the salmon farming topics which were more relevant to his work. Tuition at NAFC was always delivered on a one-to-one basis, either in the classroom or in the field. The lecturer used oral questioning for some of the knowledge and understanding and was comfortable submitting his results to SQA. Reader/scribe and other necessary support was provided by NAFC as required.

The costs for providing the training and SQA registration were calculated and submitted to the school. Funding was secured from local sources with advice and guidance from NAFC.

Meetings, telephone calls and e-mail correspondence between NAFC staff, school and parents ensured effective communication for this tailored and individualised programme and enabled parties to iron out any problems and quickly respond at an early stage.

3) Outline the project or initiative's outcome(s) within the university and beyond with relevant supporting evidence, metrics or testimony where appropriate

The primary outcome of this project is that as a result of the support provided the student concerned was able to overcome significant difficulties and successfully complete a National Progression Award in aquaculture. This has provided the student with experience, skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of the industry that he wished to work in.

The student has subsequently been employed by the company that had supported his work experience and they now intend to enter him on their ongoing Modern Apprenticeship programme for which NAFC is the approved training provider. Since entering employment the student has attended NAFC to undertake additional training courses required for his job including (including sea survival, boat handling, fire-fighting, first aid and radio operation), all of which were completed successfully with appropriate support.

In addition to the qualifications obtained, the project has had a significant positive impact on the student's personal development, assisting him to overcome significant difficulties to broaden his horizons and gain experience and confidence in his abilities.

Together, the project has helped the student to overcome the twin barriers of learning difficulties and rurality; to develop as an individual and to secure employment in an area with limited opportunities.

More generally, the project has demonstrated a model for supporting students (not only those with particular needs) in remote and rural communities through closer collaboration with their schools. Historically, students at the school involved in this project had not been able to access Vocational Pathways courses due to their distance from NAFC and the travel difficulties involved.

Through this project NAFC piloted an innovative delivery model through which NPA materials were shared with the school for delivery as part of timetabled lessons for the student concerned, enabling them to work towards a National Progression Award while still at school.

The school Head Teacher stated that without SDS input they would not have been aware of the options available for the pupil. Through developing a good working relationship with NAFC Marine Centre, employers and other agencies, the school are now able to find creative and tailored solutions with the most appropriate partners for pupils now and for the future.

Vaila Angus, Careers Advisor, Skills Development Scotland: *"it was in his 5th year that he started his NPA and completed in 2015, leaving school in June 2015. With a very successful outcome thanks to NAFC Marine Centre!"*

Kenny Gifford, Senior Aquaculture lecturer, NAFC Marine Centre UHI: *“All the best to him, I hope all goes well and I look forward to seeing him progress through the range of other related courses here at NAFC.”*

Andy Glen, Head of Training & Skills, NAFC Marine Centre UHI: *“for every student with an interest and complex needs we will undertake an individual assessment of needs and we aim to meet those needs, if we can. This ensures that we are always student focussed and we aim to break down barriers of remoteness, as well as long standing barriers to education. We will aim to be novel and we have a “can do” attitude to students with complex needs.”*