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Construction training builds Coventry's future

More than 150 local people are paving the way for a better career thanks to a £1.2m training programme.

In a UK first, colleges, universities and training providers have joined forces to offer construction trainees the chance to tool themselves up to degree level.

More than 50 local builders have gained a range of qualifications under the free Whitefriars Housing Group-led course, including NVQ Levels 2 and 3. A further 100 have completed short courses in plastering, dump-truck training, scaffolding and health and safety.

One local firm to benefit from the Coventry and Warwickshire Construction Training Partnership is Ian Neale, a building contactors based in Tennant Street, Nuneaton.

Paul Roberts, the firm's commercial director, said: "We have a workforce of around 50 people and all of the employees have been entered onto the scheme which also incorporates the CSCS health and safety accreditation.

"As the scheme offers on-site assessment it works really well with the daily production as the staff are assessed as they are working.

"When we started, we were not altogether sure how employees would take to it, but they've jumped at the opportunity and many are asking how they can gain

more qualifications. It helps their personal development, and also ensures we remain an attractive prospect for future employees and clients.

“Our clients need us to demonstrate that we have ongoing training, and this scheme allows us to do that. It does take a lot of office administration, but we would definitely recommend it to others.

“Some of those who now have NVQs thanks to the scheme never had previous qualifications. Whitefriars’ work gives them a second chance and the opportunity to better their lives.”

Chris Higgs, a trainee carpenter at Ian Neale, has gained an NVQ this year. He said the project was reaping rewards for many.

The 17-year-old, from Barnacle, near Coventry, said: “I’m working towards an NVQ – which I wouldn’t be doing if not for the course. It’s great that we can learn and be tested while working – I learn far more on site than I would in a classroom.

“A lot of my friends who have gone into similar trades aren’t with employers who offer this scheme, so they won’t get the qualifications you need to progress.

“I think it will help my career. It gives you confidence to know you can do what you say you can.”

Whitefriars Housing Group started its new role of co-ordinating construction training across Coventry and Warwickshire back in April.

Those it has teamed up with to improve education and training offered to local people includes CovWise Ltd, Coventry City Council, Coventry University, local colleges and Groundwork Coventry.

Amerjit Singh, Whitefriars operations manager, said: “The scheme has been a real success with more than 10 local organisations taking up the opportunity to equip their workforce with qualifications.

“Often those in the construction industry have all the skills, but have never sat down to take the exams to prove they have them. The Coventry and Warwickshire Construction Training Partnership means they can learn and be accessed on site, without the need to step foot in a classroom.

“By making training as easy as possible, and centred around the needs of employers and employees, the scheme is providing a pioneering answer to the construction skills shortage in the Midlands.”

Whitefriars Housing Group has been awarded £1.2m, by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Coventry and Warwickshire via the European Social Fund, to run the scheme.

The project is due to run until December 2007. Local organisations interested in finding out more, should call Mike McCullough on 024 7676 7178.

Ends

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