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Construction training builds a better future

Residents will soon be offered a step onto and up the construction careers ladder thanks to a unique £1.2m team-up amongst local colleges, training providers and Coventry University Enterprises Ltd.

In a UK first, would-be DIY-ers, electricians, architects and builders will be able to train from basic NVQ levels up to degree level and help relieve the drastic skills shortage in the construction industry.

This month Whitefriars Housing Group will start its new role of co-ordinating construction training across Coventry and Warwickshire. This is the first time in the UK that this type of link-up has taken place.

Recent research by the House Builders Federation revealed that 73 per cent of companies reported that a shortage of suitably skilled site labourers was impacting on their activities and that 57 per cent were affected by a shortage of professional staff. It is estimated that the industry needs to recruit 76,000 people each year.

Staff at the not-for-profit housing group's started work this month with nine local partners, including CovWise Ltd, Arthur Rank Training, City and North Warwickshire FE Colleges, Coventry City Council, the Construction Employment Unit, Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire and Coventry University

Enterprises Ltd, to deliver training to improve education and training offered to local people.

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.

Whitefriars offers many training schemes to tenants including DIY and basic construction training, but the link-up should mean local people can progress further up the educational ladder, with an easy and natural progression between courses, with the ultimate option of taking a degree qualification.

It is also envisaged that youngsters from 16 plus and others on the courses will be able to gain practical on-site experience as Whitefriars seeks to get businesses, charities and other housing associations on board.

Whitefriars' regeneration manager Nev Wells said the skills shortage was a major issue in Coventry and Warwickshire.

He said: "Whitefriars has been chosen to lead this innovative partnership because of our skills and experience gained through the successful partnering contracts and agreements used to deliver our 19,000 property housing regeneration works programme.

"In addition to the delivery of the physical programme, we have also developed programmes to engage, train and employ local people and businesses, which has helped both our own and other businesses reduce their exposure to significant skills and labour shortages within the national construction industry.

"In this respect, we are now being seen as a key player in the national construction-training field, and have been selling on our expertise across the country. All eyes will be on this Coventry-Warwickshire training partnership, watching how this team-up works. We expect others to follow the lead, in what

is a key economic driver and creator of significant employment and training opportunities for local people and communities.”

Peter Brady, LSC workforce development adviser, said: “This collaborative project comes at a time when there are building skills shortages coupled with a growing number of construction projects taking place in the Coventry and Warwickshire area. Our research shows that Whitefriars, as Coventry’s biggest landlord, has instant access to large numbers of people who are either looking for work and training or aiming to increase their skills.

“Whitefriars also provide an employer-led focus for the project which is vital when construction business involvement is integral to the success of the project.

“By funding this initiative we aim to co-ordinate and target training more efficiently. This way we will have a skilled workforce ready to meet the challenges and future needs of the industry here in the city and the county.”

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