

PILOT CIVILS CONSTRUCTION OPERATIVES COURSE

CITB FLEXIBLE FUND REFERENCE TRJ-16-01

START DATE 1st APRIL 2017

END DATE 31st OCTOBER 2019

MAIN PROJECT PARTNERS



MAIN CONTACT

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Given an ageing workforce within civil engineering operations, industry employers based within South and West Wales had been requesting an enhanced Civils Construction Operative Apprenticeship Course to meet the projected skills shortage.

This pilot project involved recruitment of 24 candidates who were employed by a mix of large, SME and Micro businesses who released these candidates for off-site training for a period of 13 weeks. Part of their qualification also involved on site assessment at their place of work.

Of the 24 candidates, 23 achieved their qualification. Feedback from employers varied, with employers based in South Wales accepting the piloted model of training and employers based in West Wales suggesting an amended model. This amended model has since been introduced in West Wales and its suitability to meet employers' needs is to be monitored.

Although the pilot project had flaws in terms of delivery and costings, the project as a whole should be deemed a success and will encouragingly leave a legacy with a new delivery model being trialled in West Wales and the enhanced apprenticeship continuing to be delivered within South Wales.

Most importantly the pilot project has assisted in giving a route to close a major skills gap.

INTRODUCTION

At the inception of this pilot course there was no recognized comprehensive civil engineering operatives' course to upskill the existing workforce or offer career change to others, including enticing school leavers into the construction industry.

There is a projected increase in demand of over 23% for Civil Engineering Operatives against a backdrop of 19% of current experienced operatives looking to retire from the industry within the next five to ten years. Working closely with CECA Wales the project highlighted the need for the provision in the ground works and plant sector. For a number of years the industry has reported a skills shortage, ageing workforce and lack of new entrants to the sector. These shortages have a direct correlation with rising labour and workforce costs across Wales.

The aim of this project was to provide construction employers with a structure within which to train their Civil Engineering Operatives and Engineers. The project piloted the delivery of civils construction operative training together with plant training and work based competence assessments as a coordinated package. This was the first time this approach was trialed within the region.

At the successful conclusion of this course, operatives will have achieved a recognized level of competence in essential skills, undertaken industry selected upskilling to include plant training and have been awarded an NVQ Level 2 Diploma in construction operations.

Ultimately the aim of the pilot project was to assist with upskilling the current Construction Civil Engineering workforce in South and West Wales and help improve the effectiveness of participating employers and their workforce.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

Utilising the Construction Civil Engineering (Wales) (Framework number-FR05010) apprenticeship written and issued by CITB, the project successfully delivered SQA accredited qualifications. In early stages of the provisions development, delivering SQA's Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Construction Operations and Civil Engineering Services and Level 2 Diploma in Construction Operations the project would cover all elements of the framework with key partner Coleg Sir Gar delivering essential skills to candidates if required. Based on feedback from supporting contractors it was evident that delivering the standard apprenticeship would not be sufficient to meet industry requirements for a groundworker / plant operator. An enhanced apprenticeship model was implemented, including all elements of the apprenticeship framework. This model boasted four CPCS accredited qualifications - Forward Tipping Dumper Wheeled A09, Ride on Road Roller A31, Plant and Vehicle Marshaller A73, Slinger/signaller A40. The model also included the following additionalities - NPORS Manual Handling (N704), NPORS Abrasive Wheels (N301) and Confined Space Medium Risk (City and Guilds).

To complete all elements of the enhanced apprenticeship, candidates would be required to attend a training centre for minimum of 13 training weeks. Following this, an NVQ assessor would complete a number of site visits to assess candidates' competency.

Response from industry was initially positive to the proposed training model. The fact that candidates were excelling in their place of work was generally attributed to the standard of training received. The project would receive 2 monthly tripartite progress reviews, to capture feedback from candidates and participating contractors.

FUNDING SOURCES

CITB Project Funding	£130,200.00
Project Partner Match Funding	£55,800.00
Overall Project Value	£186,000.00

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim was to pilot the provision and delivery of an enhanced Civils Construction Operatives apprenticeship. The 24 candidates would be selected by a mixture of large, SME and Micro construction businesses based throughout South and West Wales.

The objective was for this enhanced apprenticeship to be accepted by the industry as common provision and be accessible for new entrants into the industry to include school leavers. The provision would also be available to those with experience but wishing to upskill.

PROJECT APPROACH TO MEET ITS AIMS

Initial discussions in respect of recruitment took place with the contractors within the South West Wales Civil Engineering Contractor Framework which was administered by Carmarthenshire County Council. It was agreed by the 14 named contractors that each would recruit a minimum of one apprentice to take part in the pilot with any remaining places being offered to the wider construction sector. Despite this initial commitment and endorsement of the pilot scheme, only three of the Framework contractors actually delivered on this promise. Fortunately, the wider construction sector came forward to offer candidates for the pilot.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The project eventually successfully recruited 24 candidates via a series of marketing and open day events. Candidates were sourced from the South and West Wales area and trained between two training centres. Table 1 indicates success outcomes for the delivery to 24 apprentices (candidate names removed):

Candidate	NVQ	Diploma	Essential skills (AON & Comms)	CPCS (All Listed categories)	NPORS (All listed categories)	Confined Spaces
1	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
2	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
3	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
4	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
5	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
6	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
7	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
8	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
9	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
10	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
11	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
12	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
13	Not complete	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
14	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
15	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
16	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
17	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
18	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
19	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
20	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
21	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
22	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
23	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
24	Achieved	Achieved	N/A	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved

As demonstrated by table one, the pilot achieved a success outcome of 95.83%. 23 from the piloted 24 apprentices completed all elements of the apprenticeship framework including the additionalities. With national outcomes for apprenticeships in Wales set at 86% the pilot well surpassed national outcomes. A few of the more mature candidates experienced difficulties in passing the essential skills element. This was overcome due to the additional resources and coaching provided by Coleg Sir Gar.

PROJECT REVIEW

Feedback from a number of progress meetings suggested although outcomes were good, duration and costings of the apprenticeship additionalities proved to be a limitation and proved non cost effective for a number of contractors operating predominantly in the West Wales area. Eighty percent of contractors found the enhanced apprenticeship model costly and found difficulty in off-setting cost of lost time on site against available CITB grants. The majority of employers also experienced difficulty in processing of their CITB grant applications.

A quarter of candidates found some training weeks too long and content lacking. Whilst half of the candidates thought the delivery method lacked structure and co-ordination. The training deliverer for commercial reasons also decided to close one of the training centres which resulted in candidates having to travel to East Wales to conclude their training. This presented logistical difficulties to some candidates.

The project summarised three issues to address to allow the successful continuation of the apprenticeship model:

- Costings
- Duration
- Structure

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Civils Construction Operatives Apprenticeship Course as set out in this pilot continues to operate with plant operator additionalities within the South Wales region. It has become embedded with employers operating within that region and due to the greater pool of available candidates and greater economic activity, employers are accepting of the cost of delivery of the apprenticeship. The pilot has reinforced the need for such a structured apprenticeship within the South Wales region.

Circumstances were different in the West Wales region where the recruitment of suitable candidates was more of a challenge. Economic activity was also not as buoyant within this region and employers found it difficult to justify the investment in training their candidates. Given that all of these employers were micro or SME companies they also encountered resource problems due to the time that the candidates needed to complete off site training.

That said, a core of employers still expressed a desire to have some form of civil engineering groundworks training available locally within the region. Coleg Sir Gar was also keen to continue to offer some form of provision and entered in discussions with an alternative commercial training delivery partner. This has resulted in a new apprenticeship model being devised, with the aim of addressing the recommendations made by employers based within West Wales. These are listed below.

Actions:

- **Costing** – To reduce costings the new model had to remove all additionalities, although Highfield accredited Health and Safety Awareness and manual handling short courses are included. The new model is now delivered at no cost to contractors.
- **Duration** – Total off site training has reduced from 13 weeks to 9 weeks.
- **Structure** – All training weeks and dates are now issued before candidates start. A new e portfolio system to track and monitor feedback has been introduced.

The new model has now been implemented, with 8 candidates from the West Wales area successfully recruited. Coleg Sir Gar are now continuing to fund the new model with its new commercial training partner delivering the Diploma and NVQ elements of the apprenticeship framework.

The new model utilises new innovative tracking and monitoring software. The e-track system tracks and monitors candidates' progress. With the new portfolio in place, contractors can be reassured that their candidates are advancing and receive live feedback in relation to progress on candidates' main qualifications.

The new model aims to replicate the impressive attainment outcomes of the pilot and address the three main issues identified by contractors and candidates. The apprenticeship hopes to tackle the skills shortage in industry and attract new entrants into the industry.

The new curriculum being proposed by Qualifications Wales indicates that the first year of craft construction training within the further education sector should be spent acquiring a range of skills. This could include a civil engineering and groundworks skills module.

Given its continued involvement in civil engineering apprenticeship delivery, Coleg Sir Gar now has an opportunity to develop such a module. This may encourage first year further education students to consider a Civils Construction Operative apprenticeship.

Another recommendation of this pilot is to assess the suitability of offering in future the option of undertaking a Civils Construction Operative apprenticeship on a shared model operated by Cyfle Building Skills.

CASE STUDY VIDEO – DAFYDD MULLHOLAND

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