



NORTH EAST SCOTLAND AGRICULTURE ADVISORY GROUP – 3 JUNE 2015 PROGRESS UPDATE ON RURAL INTERNSHIP PROJECT

1 Recommendation

1.1 It is recommended that the Group notes and approves this report.

2 Discussion

- 2.1 Aberdeenshire Council, Ringlink and Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS) joined forces in 2013 to develop an agricultural internship project to provide a structured introduction to a career in the land-based sector for young people. The placement involves interns working in a practical workplace under the supervision of a mentor combined with formal training and tuition sessions. Interns are paid whilst on the placement and work a 40-hour week. Around two thirds of the interns' wage costs are covered by employers/mentors, with project funders covering the balance along with training and other costs. Ringlink, which manages the programme and provides intern training, continues to invest significant levels of senior management time in the project.
- 2.2 Interns are trained as a group in the initial phase, undertaking training in safe methods of working, first aid, manual handling, instruction in tractor driving and a guided trip to the Royal Highland Show. Thereafter they start individual work placements with their mentors to gain work experience with day release for further training.
- 2.3 Having funded all 6 places on the first intake in June 2013, Aberdeenshire Council funded 6 places on the second phase of the project which started in June 2014. Additional financial contributions (totalling over £50,000) were raised from NFU Scotland's Centenary Trust, The Mains of Loirston Charitable Trust, AgriScot and the Royal Northern Agricultural Society. Ringlink (Scotland) Ltd also made a substantial financial contribution, increasing the number of internship places from 6 to 15. The geographic scope of the programme extended into Angus and Moray in 2014 (reflecting the wider funding base). Most were from non-farming families. Twelve of the fifteen interns completed the course and are now employed in the land-based sector.
- 2.4 2015 Update
Twelve internship places are available this year. The programme starts on 8 June. At the time of writing, 10 applicants have been offered a place. Most have already been allocated a mentor/employer. A small number of candidates will be interviewed shortly to fill the remaining places – which have been reduced from 15 in 2014 to 12 in 2015 for operational reasons (easier to arrange transportation, accommodation etc.) Most candidates are, again, from north Aberdeenshire and all have shown a preference for a farm-based placement – one intern in 2014 wished to pursue a career in gamekeeping while another chose quarrying.

- 2.5 Aberdeenshire Council funding was limited to years one and two of the project (2013 and 2014). Ringlink has succeeded in generating sufficient financial support for the project to proceed in 2015, with very significant contributions from Mains of Loirston Trust (again), the Home Grown Cereal Association – and Ringlink.
- 2.6 The most significant change to the programme in 2015 is the active involvement of SRUC. The residential pre-placement training period will be based at Craibstone campus, with SRUC and Ringlink co-delivering training and site visits. This very welcome development will ease management of the intern cohort and reduce project costs.
- 2.7 Even more importantly, SRUC engagement has enabled the internship to be recognised under the Certificate of Work Readiness (CWR). As a result, the training period will be extended to 3 weeks, the term of the work placement will be extended and the internship programme should, in future, be able to access government training funds. Subject to satisfactory progress on this point, the cost of the programme will decrease significantly and open up the prospect of the internship being extended across Scotland.
- 2.8 The internship model has now been extended into the fishing industry.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-31061809>

3 Financial, Staffing and Equalities implications

- 3.1 There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report. In respect of equalities all applications to the internship are considered on their individual merits. The financial implications were approved by Aberdeenshire Council's Policy and Resources Committee on 20 September 2012 under the 100 Days/ 6 Key Areas Initiative.

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