

**College:** Fermanagh College of Further and Higher Education  
**Location:** Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, UNITED KINGDOM  
**Practice:** SELECT NVQs for the Hospitality Industry  
 Training workers in the hospitality industry

*Year Started* 1997

*Budget* £87,000 (\$126,000)

*Program Participants* 91

*College FTE* 1,800

*Target Sector* Hospitality Industry service employees

*Staff Size* 6 FT

*Structure* On site qualifications training

*Key Outcomes* Issued 262 National Vocational Qualifications  
 51 Training and Development units

## Introduction

Tourism is growing in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, most employees in the hospitality industry have limited education and skills training. For example, two-thirds of catering staff have no post-secondary qualifications; nearly one-half of have no qualifications whatsoever. Training, however, requires capital—an investment with a low return given the high rate of turnover in the industry. Consequently, mechanisms for cost-effective training that lead to not only higher quality services, but also to increased retention are needed.

To address these needs, Fermanagh College in partnership with five other colleges secured European Funding through the Tourism and Hospitality Training Council and launched the SELECT NVQs for Hospitality Program in 1997. The program incorporates National Vocation Qualifications

(NVQs) for the industry, increases participation in and appreciation of training opportunities, and increases awareness of the importance of industry competence.

## Community Background

County Fermanagh is in the southwestern region of Northern Ireland. It is a rural area that historically relied on agriculture and more recently on tourism. Growth in the telecommunications, energy, and crafts sectors are also emerging sources of economic development.

Unemployment is high in Fermanagh, higher than the national average. Most of the unemployed are male and considered “long-term” (that is, unemployed for more than one year). Fermanagh’s working age population is lower than the national

Program focus	Sector specific	Economic conditions	Economic base			Target populations
			Mfg	Agr	Svc	
Technical education	Yes	Distressed	N/A	N/A	N/A	Dislocated workers, general

<i>Service Area</i>	<i>County Fermanagh</i>
<i>Total Population</i>	54,900
<i>Median Household Income</i>	£350 (\$500) per week
<i>% Below Poverty Level</i>	10
<i>% Unemployment Rate</i>	10
<i>% Minority Population</i>	2
<i>% Rural Population</i>	70
<i>% High School Graduates</i>	60
<i>% College Graduates</i>	50

average due to higher proportions of children and elderly. These factors combine to impede economic development.

## Program Description

Administered by Fermanagh College of Further and Higher Education, SELECT NVQs was one piece of a larger project aimed at aiding the tourism industry and run by a consortium of six regional colleges and the Hospitality Association for Northern Ireland. Fermanagh’s piece of the project targeted the catering industry. Other consortium members focused restaurants, hotels, museums, and other visitor attractions.

By design, the program lasted only one year. It received funding from the EU Peace and Reconciliation Group. Approximately £85,000 went to Fermanagh.

To begin the program, Fermanagh invited 60 potential workforce partners from its surrounding region to participate. Of those 60, 27 firms joined with the college and put 91 employees through training that, for some, ultimately resulted in National Vocational Qualifications on levels 1-3.

Training consisted of updating and upskilling in the areas of Reception, Accommodation Services, Bar Service, Restaurant Service, Food Preparation and Cooking at Level 2, Kitchen and Larder, Restaurant Supervision, Patisserie & Confectionery, and Training and Development at Level 3. In addition, short programs in Wine & Spirits and Food Hygiene were attended by many employees.

In order to get employers (and employees) to participate, the college had to be flexible, make participation as easy as possible, and establish that

involvement in the program was a worthwhile investment—one that would lead to business growth. Examples of the college’s efforts in this regard include:

- An “NVQ Pack” was produced to inform the employers and employees in a simplified manner not only the benefits of achieving NVQ qualification, but also to explain the requirements of the program
- Training was offered—as much as possible—at the convenience of the employer and participant at the work site
- Training and assessment were often conducted simultaneously to streamline the process

Following training and satisfactory assessment came certification. Following certification came money. “Output related funding” paid employers directly for their participants who completed training and earned certification. This direct financial benefit to the employer not only compensated for lost time, but also provided incentive for employees to finish the program and become certified.

## Outcomes

Of the 91 employees that entered training, 66 earned NVQs on levels 1-3. In addition, managers, owners, and unemployed people also received training. Improved qualifications, of course, lead to better productivity and more employment opportunities.

The establishments involved found staff turn over and absenteeism had decreased considerably, while levels of employee moral improved. Program participants stated that employees felt more valued when given time to gain qualifications while at work.

## Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability

According to participants, strengths of the SELECT program at large included increased awareness of the benefits of training and the workforce-friendly delivery of training.

Another strength lies in the consortium approach. While the focus of the program is the tourism and hospitality sector, each consortium member can approach the sector in its own way.

Thus, if specific training is not available through one member, another may provide it. Such a consortium, however, needs a managing body to coordinate and leverage resources.

There are aspects of the program that require review and continued development. These aspects mainly involve the very short time span of the program. One year is not sufficient to ensure the cultural shift necessary for continued workforce development. Indeed, evaluators of the SELECT program recommended three years for initial planning, marketing, and development. It should be noted, however, that the program's success has encouraged Fermanagh to maintain its ties to the business community and to continue to form local alliances, such that training can continue to take place.

A significant challenge in continuing this training initiative is funding. Even if the program were to become self-sustaining, sufficient funding is needed early on to allow it to establish the partnerships and foster the cultural shifts necessary to enable it to become self-sustaining.

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