

Dear Helen

I wanted to write this note to thank you personally and the Professional Gardener's Trust for your support in awarding me a grant to allow me to undertake the ASCENTIS Level 3 Award in Education and Training (AET) at York College.

As you know, I am keen and committed to develop myself professionally and unfortunately, my employer does not provide support to allow employees to take these steps. My low income (as a Gardener) and family circumstances meant that I would not have been able to join this course without the support provided by the Professional Gardener's Trust.

One area of my job that I love particularly is that of sharing my enthusiasm for gardening and horticulture with other people; my colleagues, visitors to our gardens (which are open to the general public) and trainees, volunteers and work placements. I really enjoy taking part in the workshops that we run and teaching people horticultural skills and this led me to consider if there was a qualification that could enhance my abilities in these areas of my role and also lead to other teaching and training opportunities within horticulture.

The ASCENTIS Level 3 Award seemed perfect as it is set up as an introduction to teaching and explores roles and responsibilities associated with the teaching role. The course ran for a twelve week term and I attended York College every Wednesday 6 - 9pm after work. During this time I learnt about engaging and motivating learners and how to establish ground rules within a learning environment. The course explored the general principles and theories of teaching, how to put a teaching plan together and the different assessment methods appropriate for differing scenarios.

A key part of the course was learning the necessary skills and approaches to deliver an assessed microteaching session in front of my peer group and tutor. For my microteach I chose to deliver a thirty minute teaching session on Bulbs (What is a bulb? The different parts of a bulb? How can we use bulbs? Key factors to consider when planting bulbs etc..) which included a practical bulb planting activity so that all of my class could take part. Pulling together a lesson plan, the resources required and also incorporating different methods of teaching (pedagogical and androgical) meant that it took plenty of thought and planning.

During the course the tutor provides the students with a lot of relevant material, however I would say that the emphasis is certainly on the student to take this information and build on that knowledge by reading around the subject. This element of self-led learning is essential in order to be able to complete the written assignments. What I became aware of was that by doing this I was using and embedding the knowledge and skills required in order to become an effective trainer, and I could apply these same processes to any subject matter I wished.

Taking this qualification has been very useful, rewarding and enjoyable - there were eighteen people on my course and each had a different story to tell. There were plenty of opportunities to engage in group work and get to know one another better, and by the end of the course we all became confident in applying the education and training approaches we had been taught, and felt able to take these away and use them in our respective roles.

For me, I will be utilising my new skills when training volunteers and working with horticulture students that come to work in our gardens and I will also be able to incorporate them within the workshops that we run for members of the public. I am also looking at how I can take the next step and obtain some experience teaching horticulture in a Further Education setting.

Thanks once again, Steve.