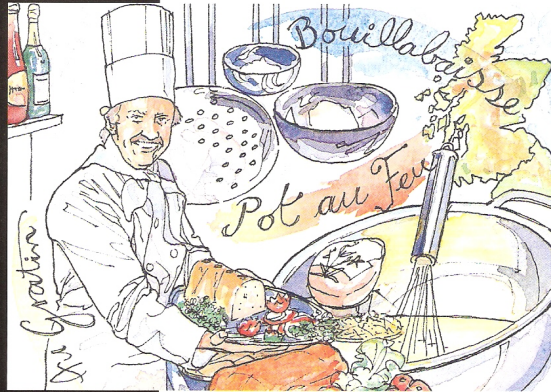


# OPEN LEARNING

*'French at Work' in Scotland*

## FRENCH WITHOUT TEARS



### The Business Needs

French is well-established as the traditional language of both kitchen and restaurant and as such is a regular part of the everyday lives of large numbers of catering staff. However, while menus may be written in French and cooking processes most commonly known by their French equivalents, catering staff are rarely encouraged to

speak or understand the language. Until recently, it was considered sufficient for catering trainees to cover 'Kitchen French' in craft training, something which usually involved simply the translation of basic terms. The idea that a member of staff might order supplies in French or speak the language outside the confines of the kitchen area was totally new.

The need to encourage young kitchen staff in the catering industry to build on their basic French and apply it in a commercial context prompted Scottish Enterprise to initiate a 'French at Work' project with the Hotel and Catering Training Company (HCTC) in Scotland.

John Brinkins, senior development executive at Scottish Enterprise, believed that the benefits of such an initiative would extend far beyond the immediate hotel/restaurant context:

"Young people will have a tremendous influence on the future of Scotland's tourist industry. Competence in languages in particular will ensure that companies are able to compete more favourably in existing and new markets. It is essential that we enable young people to gain those new skills."

It was decided that a training programme based largely on Open Learning was best suited to the needs of the trainees and their employers. The flexibility of the Open Learning approach was an ideal



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LEARNING METHODS CASE STUDY

## O P E N L E A R N I N G

choice for an industry which sees daily peaks and lulls in activity and which involves companies often based in rural areas.

Twelve organisations were chosen to participate in the project. All were in the vicinity of Perth and Dundee and all had young trainees on the HCTC's Food Preparation Training Programme. Participating companies varied widely in size, ranging from the Forte Royal George Hotel in Perth to the Belmont Arms, a small country inn on the outskirts of Dundee.

### **Training Objectives**

At the beginning of the project, a series of objectives was established. The Open Learning materials should be:

- practical, stimulating and motivating (i.e. a programme that would not be associated with the way in which trainees had learned French in school)
- directly related to the commercial business needs of the catering industry in Scotland.

It was essential that trainees were made to feel confident in their learning and that they obtained a skill level which would be professionally accredited. With these priorities in mind, the Centre of Open Learning at Perth College was appointed to develop a tailored Open Learning package.

### **The Development of a Training Solution**

In order to meet the requirements of Scotvec Level 1 (the external qualification to which trainees would be working), trainees had to be able to:

- exchange personal information with speakers of the target language
- obtain and provide goods and services
- understand simple written texts.

In order to meet the needs of their employers, trainees had to:

- understand the meaning of commercial French
- describe and order commodities in French.

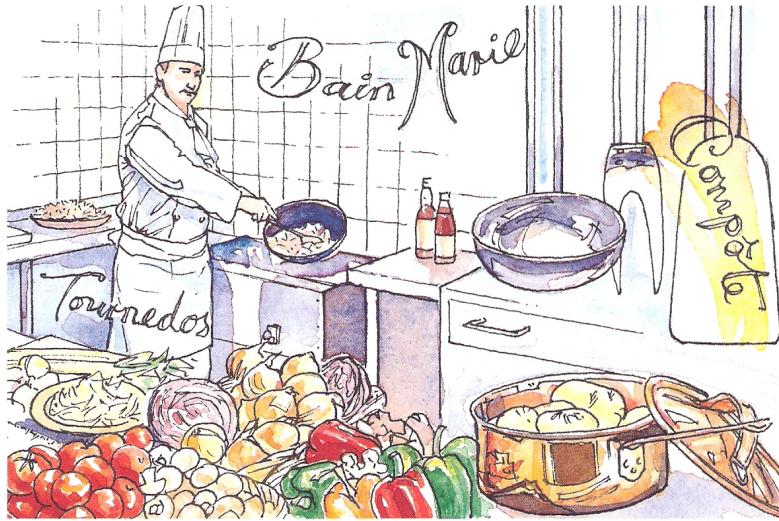
To minimise time away from the workplace and to help reinforce the learning process, the scheme provided exercises which could be done in the trainee's own time and/or at work. It was essential that the content was relevant to the needs of the business and related to the skills required. In order to maintain motivation the style had to be practical, with a minimum of textual information and as many opportunities for practice as possible.

With these priorities in mind, a French tutor at Perth College was contacted to produce the material to an identified specification. Consultations with both employers and the HCTC led to agreements on the level of vocabulary required and on examples to be included.

### **The Training Programme**

The package comprised a range of 'core' areas:

- greetings
- information
- directions



- shopping
- shopping at the market
- kitchen
- food preparation

Each unit was supported by an audio tape of spoken French and by weekly tutorials.

It was anticipated that an average trainee might take 20 weeks to cover the eight units, including weekly two-hour tutor support sessions. Each trainee was expected to study for up to two hours per week and was given both audio tapes and workbooks. Ten male and ten female trainees started the pilot programme.

The emphasis of the programme was very much on spoken French. A key element involved the trainee listening to the tape and

recording his or her response which was then monitored by the tutor so that individual feedback could be given.

Each unit followed the same basic structure :

- key words and phrases summarised in the text and recorded on tape
- examples of key words and phrases used in practice summarised in the text and recorded on tape
- exercises requiring application of key words and phrases summarised in text and recorded on tape. Trainees were then expected to record their responses.

During the weekly tutorial session, trainees were given individual feedback on performance and the group was given further opportunities to practise before being introduced to new material.

### **Student Feedback**

A questionnaire was circulated to all trainees before the final assessment. Many commented that they particularly enjoyed the weekly support sessions and the help and guidance provided by the tutor. Although the early sections involved some necessary grammar, later units were found to be highly relevant to the students' work.

### **The Next Step**

Of the twenty trainees who started the programme, 17 completed the course and 14 have been passed as competent at Scotvec Level 1. Each now has the opportunity to move on to Scotvec Level 2. Employers found that the training process boosted the confidence of trainees, making them more productive and competent in their work.

The training also increased the flexibility of catering staff who were able to assume responsibility for areas outside the kitchen and have direct contact with foreign guests.

As a direct result of this successful pilot initiative, the HCTC is considering making language training an integral part of all its trainee schemes. It is also looking at how the structure used for kitchen preparation could be adapted for food service and related craft areas such as accommodation.

For the twelve companies involved in the programme, Open Learning has increased staff motivation and commitment and led to improved customer service.

*This Case Study is one of a series of eight covering Open Learning and foreign languages in the hospitality and leisure sector.*