

Cairngorms Connections Project Update

Prepared by: Heather Galbraith, Sustainable Tourism Officer

Purpose: To update the ViSIT Forum on progress with the Cairngorms Connections Project to date and seek advice on the way forward.

Background

The Cairngorms Connections course was developed from a National Park Welcome Course following feedback from delegates that said the course focused too much on basic customer care and did not provide enough information about the National Park.

The Cairngorms Connections Course is therefore a product knowledge training course, primarily aimed at those working in the frontline of the tourism industry within the CNP. It was developed in partnership with Moray College, Tourist Board Training (TBT) and the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) with a pilot course held in March 2005 and a 'Training for Trainers' session in April 2005. Final changes were then made to the course before it was rolled out to the tourism industry, and now includes input from a representative of the CNPA, and networking is encouraged throughout the session.

Funding

Development of the course was funded by TBT who have European Social Funding for a project 'Training for the Employed in Scotland's National Parks'. This funding also subsidised attendance costs for delegates in Aberdeenshire and Angus (Objective 2 area). The CNPA subsidised attendance costs for delegates from Strathspey and Moray.

After 50% subsidy, there was a charge of £20 per head for attendees, which included a light lunch and complimentary tickets to key visitor attractions within the Park.

Courses so far

Date	Trainer / CNPA rep	Location	Delegates
9 May 05	Margaret Harris / HG	Kincraig	9
10 May 05	Anne Harper / HG	Ballater	8
23 May 05	Margaret Harris / PC	Aviemore	11
25 May 05	Anne Harper / PC	Tomintoul	7
7 Nov 05	Margaret Harris / HG	Kincraig	7
14 Nov 05	Margaret Harris / AF	Aviemore	8
			50

Courses were also originally planned for Kirriemuir, Blair Atholl, Laggan, Boat of Garten and Braemar but had to be cancelled due to insufficient numbers.

In addition, 11 delegates from Strathspey attended a day-long familiarisation visit to other areas of the Park. A similar trip for delegates from the Deeside area had been planned but cancelled due to lack of numbers.

Feedback

Feedback from all the courses is summarised in the following table.

1.1 How appropriate were the stated objectives of the course to your needs?		
	Response Percent	Response Total
Entirely	51%	25
Mostly	44.9%	22
50/50	4.1%	2

Slightly	0%	0			
Total respondents		49			
Skipped this question		0			
2.2 To what extent did the course meet its stated objectives?					
Entirely	64.6%	31			
Mostly	35.4%	17			
50/50	0%	0			
Slightly	0%	0			
Total respondents		48			
Skipped this question		1			
3.3 Will the course be useful to you in your work with tourists?					
Entirely	53.1%	26			
Mostly	44.9%	22			
50/50	2%	1			
Slightly	0%	0			
Total respondents		49			
Skipped this question		0			
6.6 Was the level of the course					
Too basic	2%	1			
About right	98%	48			
Too advanced	0%	0			
Total respondents		49			
Skipped this question		0			
10.9 Please comment on the following features of the course, adding explanations if need					
	High	Satisfactory	Tolerable	Low	Response Total
Course admin/pre course	45% (21)	55% (26)	0% (0)	0% (0)	47
Course admin/during course	59% (27)	41% (19)	0% (0)	0% (0)	46
Support material (handouts etc)	68% (32)	32% (15)	0% (0)	0% (0)	47
Venue	57% (26)	41% (19)	2% (1)	0% (0)	46
Total respondents					47
Skipped this question					2

Encouraging Uptake

The courses have been promoted through the VisitScotland Network, Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce, local press and direct mail to tourism businesses, and the number of attendees is therefore disappointing considering the positive feedback that has been received.

Two of the main reasons for this are thought to be:

- Potential delegates could have been put off by the negative response to the previous National Park Welcome course.
- The fee of £20 per head may be a factor, with businesses feeling that the course should be fully subsidised if the CNPA's aim to ensure all staff are fully informed about the NP area.

Next Steps

Future courses

Two further courses are planned for May 2006 (16th in Ballater and 22nd in Aviemore) with the option to add additional courses if there is sufficient demand.

Online course

Following a suggestion and agreement by the ViSIT Forum, TBT have contracted the Scottish Agricultural College to develop the Cairngorms Connections Course into an online resource over the next 6 months, and this will allow those based outside the park, but leading tours

within the park, such as Blue Badge Guides, to access the relevant information about the Park. In addition a small project group of CNPA staff has been convened to provide all the relevant information and to ensure linkages between associated projects such as other developing education websites.

As well as catering for relevant businesses based outwith the Park area, the online course will be a more appealing format for some businesses based within the park, as it would eliminate the need for travelling and allow delegates to study in their own time. It could also be made available as an educational resource for schools.

It is planned that the online course will follow the same format as the existing course with a series of general information sections followed by a virtual 'learning journey' around the park through the eyes of different visitor types.

The course should be available as widely as possible through the LearnDirect Scotland network, and a CD version will also be available direct from CNPA or TBT. Ideally there would be no charge for the course, but individual LearnDirect centres may charge a small fee for administration. It is hoped that the course will be ready in early autumn.

Should it be decided to focus on the on-line courses only, the face-to-face networking that has been part of the appeal of the course to date will be lost.

Summary and Views of the ViSIT Forum

Two further Cairngorms Connections Course have been arranged for May. In the meantime, an on-line course will be developed which should be ready for early autumn.

The views of the ViSIT Forum are sought on whether there is sufficient evidence to decide that the focus should be on the on-line course alone (given the low attendance rate to date); whether this should be reviewed after the May courses or whether a full review on the best way forward should take place once the on-line course has been rolled out to businesses and used for a significant period (6-12 months or so).