

Students inspired by getting their hands dirty

Sheringham High School is one of the first in the Eastern Region to take advantage of an innovative new 'hands-on' qualification from the National Open College Network (NOCN) which provides an alternative to traditional classroom activity, and aims to energise and inspire youngsters in finding their future vocation. The school is offering students the chance to swap the classroom for gardens and workshops and get their hands dirty whilst working towards a new nationally recognised qualification called Step-UP.

Growing organic fruit and vegetables, visiting farms and investigating issues concerning food production are all part of the year long horticulture course, while in the workshop students are building their own motor bike and learning how to service a car. The courses offer an alternative approach to the traditional curriculum. Spending one day a week, the students are engaged and motivated to identify their individual strengths and interests. As well learning practical skills in gardening and mechanics, the 15-16 year olds are learning key life skills such as teamwork, leadership skills and time management.

The benefit of the Step-UP qualifications for the school is that it provides the flexibility to use external partners, including local authority and voluntary organisations, with the relevant expertise to deliver the coursework. In Sheringham High School's case, they use Norfolk County Council's Holt Hall Field Studies Centre for the horticulture elements of the course.

Sheringham headteacher Tim Roderick commented: "Step-UP is making a real difference for our students, boosting their confidence, raising aspirations and making them more independent. They're all motivated and excited about the prospect of gaining a nationally recognised qualification. A bonus with the Open College Network qualification is that it gives us the flexibility to use expertise outside the school, opening up all sorts of new possibilities to deliver a broader, more inclusive curriculum to meet the needs of more of our students."



Sid Beaumont teaches the mechanics course and says: "It's gratifying to see these youngsters taking a keen interest in what they are doing, and not only learning the practical side of things but developing skills such as time management and teamwork, and becoming more responsible for their own future."