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CAMBRIDGE REGIONAL COLLEGE RECEIVES MAJOR AWARD FOR WORK WITH FIREFIGHTERS

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Cambridge firefighters have had the mysteries of the internet unveiled to them – thanks to hardworking IT specialists at Cambridge Regional College.



In a pilot scheme which is already being copied elsewhere in the country, the city's finest brushed up their IT skills, including email, word processing, power point and using the internet, while they were on duty at Cambridge fire station.

And the success of the scheme has brought a prestigious honour for the college's ITQ department – a TUC Quality Award, presented to Cambridge Regional College's John Pritchard at the TUC regional conference.

"We were very honoured by the award," said John, who set up the scheme with Cambridgeshire Fire Brigades Union. "The FBU nominated us because they were really pleased with the work we had done."

The success of the scheme was in allowing the firefighters to choose which units they wanted to work on to meet their working needs within their various job roles and to work at their own pace.

“We were asked if we could come up with a way of helping the firefighters get to grips with IT. They had tried normal courses, but couldn’t keep them up because of their duties and had struggled to teach themselves through the internet or the ‘in-house’ courses provided by the Fire Service,” said John.

“We arranged to go in to the fire station and take in two additional stand-alone PCs (giving a total of six PCs) for two days a week, around eight hours at a time so we could cover all four shifts. And if lessons were interrupted by firefighting duties we just waited until they came back.

“We were prepared to be very flexible, letting people study at their own pace, and it worked. Forty-one firefighters have completed their Level 2 course in IT over the past year and 12 have now progressed to do their Level 3.”

The delighted firefighters have spread the word, and now other stations in the region are setting up training programmes.

“Cambridge was the pilot for the country as it is quite a big station,” said John, who is in charge of ITQ Employer Engagement at the college. “They said if it worked here it would be done throughout the country. We are delighted with the progress everyone has made.”

The College is the country’s biggest deliverer of ITQ, and involved in national trials for qualifications.

“We do well because we bring flexibility in training and delivery,” said John. “Some people aren’t prepared to go out into the workplace and into factories to teach people, or to work on night shifts to capture all the company’s staff – but we are and we get some amazing results.”

Martin Harding, the FBU’s learning co-ordinator for Cambridgeshire, said the College instructors had bent over backwards to help the firefighters.

“I can’t say thank you enough. They’ve been superb, always helpful, always there, and we were delighted to nominate them for the award.

“Staff at Cambridge are all really impressed and grateful; they’re very happy with their personal development over the last year. The College has done everything we would like them to do and more.”

John was invited to the TUC’s Southern and Eastern Region conference on November 12th to receive the award from top crime writer Val McDermid.

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MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

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