



Recruit, Retain, Reward.

**Raising the professionalism and
skills of the English pig industry**

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Background and summary

In 2006, the English pig industry launched its first skills strategy, *From Sustainability to Sustained Ability*, which aimed to improve and safeguard the future of the industry through the professional development of its people. The strategy, developed by the industry itself, aimed to build on the existing skills in our industry's dedicated workforce and attract new people to the industry.

This original pig industry strategy was at the forefront of skills development in agriculture and, since its launch in 2006, a number of wider farming industry initiatives have been developed. Of particular note is the development of a cross sector group, the AgriSkills Forum.

This group has a vision of:

A profitable and sustainable agricultural industry, fully capable of meeting the demands and challenges of agriculture and land management in the 21st century. This will be delivered by a world-class, competent, innovative and professional workforce whose professionalism is recognised and rewarded and where skills development is fundamental and integral to all businesses. The significance of farming will be recognised and valued by society and the industry becomes a career.

The pig industry stepped up to the challenge and the results are shown in increased engagement by pig producers and awareness of the benefits of developing their staff. Since the launch of the first pig industry strategy, there have been numerous achievements including:

- The development and delivery of a national skills offer, covering all levels of staff
- Dedicated resources within BPEX to support the industry
- Successful grant applications to allow engagement in an economical way
- Development and delivery of regional and national structured courses
- Delivery of courses specifically for the pig industry, accredited by the Institute for Leadership and Management (ILM); 56 delegates have completed courses since 2010
- Development and delivery of the Pig Industry Professional Register (PIPR)
- Skills development has undoubtedly contributed to increased sow productivity, from 19.8 pigs finished per sow per year in 2006 to 23.5 in 2012.

In a landscape of rising production costs, reducing margins and intensifying global competition, now more than ever, producers need to make every investment count to ensure the business is responding, improving competitiveness and has a sustainable future.

For the industry to respond to future demands, every business needs to ensure that staff are competent. Investments are easy to justify in relation to technology, innovation or knowledge but less obvious when looking at staff. However, it is clear that, without competent and knowledgeable staff, other investments will not be fully utilised.

Skills development and training continues to play a key role in BPEX's overall strategy, complementing, as it does, the knowledge transfer and research and development activity. It is helping to ensure all pig unit staff are equipped with the husbandry, data interpretation and decision-making skills to contribute to improved herd productivity.

Recruit, Retain, Reward

Not only do we have to retain the staff we have, but we also need to attract new staff who will lead the industry forward in the future.

Recruit, Retain, Reward has been written with this vision in mind and complements the ongoing work of the AgriSkills Forum. Equally, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board has been formed and is working to improve the coordination of skills development across the sectors it represents, helping them progress in this important area and learn from each other to improve the industry offer. *Recruit, Retain, Reward* is a pig industry skills strategy for the next five years. It recognises the significant steps that have already been taken but also outlines steps still needed to ensure the industry remains sustainable and profitable.

Recruit, Retain, Reward forms a roadmap of action to achieve the wider AHDB objectives which are:

- Recognise existing provision of skills and skills development activities
- Promote skills development and professionalism as a sound business investment
- Promote the industry as a professional and progressive place to work
- Support and guide government policies regarding skills and professionalism
- Support Defra in its engagement with other departments and agencies on skills.

There is a shift in focus from simply engaging and recognising staff, to a wider remit on the recruitment, retention and rewarding of staff. The challenge is now to improve our working practices, develop our plans and increase the investment we all make in our staff. They are, after all, the most important asset a business has.



Objectives

The original mission statement of the 2006 strategy, From Sustainability to Sustained Ability, remains true in 2013:

To propagate and promote a culture that recognises the central role that investment in staff training and continual professional development play in the improvement of business performance and competitiveness within the English pig industry, through establishing a framework that is able to deliver appropriate learning and skills provision and continued professional development opportunities.'

However, with significant progress made against the original objectives, the focus to deliver this mission is now shifting and the specific objectives of the new Recruit, Retain, Reward strategy are:

1 Recruit: Provide and promote an attractive environment for a progressive career within and allied industries

- Develop work-based learning opportunities via apprenticeships, on-farm qualifications, etc
- Produce a clear career structure with transparent development pathways
- Identify industry champions to promote the industry to potential recruits
- Ensure careers advisors/services have up-to-date information about the sector
- Support AHDB Education group to improve information and opportunities available
- Support industry careers initiatives such as IGD, Bright Crop, Future of Food and Farming and Lantra

2 Retain: Promote skills development as vital to business improvement

- Maintain a skills offer that is relevant, flexible and accessible at all levels
- Improve uptake of 'soft skills' training to improve staff management skills across the industry
- Demonstrate and promote the business benefits of investing in individuals
- Identify needs and gaps to be addressed through training within the industry
- Explore resource opportunities to deliver effective development within the sector
- Develop a tool kit to support structured training within an organisation.

3 Reward: Promote recognition of achievement to motivate staff

- Promote the Pig Industry Professional Register (PIPR) as the way to achieve and record professional recognition
 - Reward and acknowledge individuals' development, ie Trainee of The Year Award
 - Reward the increasing demonstration of competency through linking to other industry schemes, eg earned recognition
 - Develop support for staff recognition, ie benefits statements.
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Current situation

Following an extended period of low margins, the delivery of a relevant, flexible and cost-effective training programme is even more important to ensure the English pig sector becomes competitive and profitable. The industry has worked hard to break down the traditional barriers to training uptake such as lack of awareness of events, relevance of training programmes and difficulty in accessing funding.

While skills development within the industry is increasing in profile and engagement, it is perhaps still seen by many as a cost and compliance issue rather than a business investment and priority. The reality is that continuous development of individuals is essential if businesses are to remain efficient and competitive in the increasingly competitive global market.

Over the past five years, BPEX has tried to 'hide' the complex nature of training and funding as much as possible, so that producers have a simple interface which helps them choose and access relevant training.

A full pig industry skills offer has been developed since the original strategy was launched, investing significant resources and utilising European and government funding through the Rural Development Programme of England (RDPE), as summarised in the table below. The following table summarises the current offer:

	Stockman	Supervisor	Manager	Owner
Training programmes				
Stockman Development Scheme	●			
Stockman Plus	●	●		
Leadership Development Scheme		●	●	
Professional Manager Development Scheme			●	●
Qualifications				
Certificates of Competence	●	●	●	
Workshops				
Local workshops	●	●	●	●
In-house workshops	●	●	●	●

Engagement

In 2009, over 6,000¹ people worked full-time in the pig industry across 10,000 commercial holdings. The size of businesses in the pig industry ranges from one holding through to multiple holding and it is generally said that 80% of commercial production originates from just 20% of the businesses operating. Levels of engagement have risen significantly since the inception of the original strategy. The skills offer has grown organically from initial activities and in response to industry demand. More than 400 training events, in addition to BPEX knowledge transfer events, were run through the RDPE programme between 2009 and 2012. Over 1,000 people took part in this training, many of whom attended more than one session.

The types of training have included local workshops, programmes run over a number of months, technical seminars, discussion groups and study tours. Each event was arranged based on industry demand in a particular region.

¹ Matrix Report, 2012

Challenges and opportunities

Recruitment and retention

It is estimated that 55% of the industry is over 45 years old, with a fifth aged over 60. This means new people must be attracted and retained. Because of the delay involved in the training of young people, it will not be possible to depend solely on the natural inflow and the industry needs to be actively recruiting quality staff now.

Without entry level qualifications or an obvious development pathway in place, the pig industry is viewed as a low skilled job with little or no progression in place. Professional recognition is not widely accepted and this is reflected in the image held by the wider public.

Staff recruitment can be expensive in terms of cost and time and when it goes wrong it can have a big impact on the productivity of the farm. Recruitment needs to be considered carefully to ensure the right person is hired for the right role in the business.

Retention of quality staff is reliant on staff being valued and allowed opportunities to develop. Because a large proportion of the industry comprises small businesses, by default the chance of promotion is limited. For many, promotion will come only from staff leaving or by staff moving on so alternative ways of rewarding and motivating staff need to be considered.

Equally, the size of a business often means there is not a formal human resources representative who would normally recruit and review staff performance. Examples where businesses have taken a more proactive role in this area have seen clear benefits and a rise in staff retention rates. They also see improvements in the ability to recruit when they need to.

Progression

Achieving promotion is commonly thought of as the only route of progression but can be difficult in many businesses with limited roles. However, people can develop within their own role and this should be more widely encouraged. Professional development can help people become more technically competent and develop their expertise, allowing them to take on more responsibility. Investing in these people is more than compensated for by the improved motivation and production results of staff.

Another route of progression is for people with practical expertise and knowledge to become trained trainers or assessors. This can either happen internally with companies running in-house training programmes or working externally either as part of their current job or as a full-time role. With an increase in demand for training, people following this route would ensure the industry has more experienced trainers, improving both the amount and quality of training available.

Similarly, mentoring and coaching younger or new staff is a rewarding experience and is an excellent way of passing on years of practical experience. Training people to coach and mentor would help with retention of staff, business productivity and provide more support for new entrants.

Professional development

Many of the courses and events run for the pig industry do not have an accreditation to a national qualifications body so it is important that people still gain recognition for participating. Therefore, the Pig Industry Professional Register (PIPR) was created to enable everybody to build an individual profile of the events they have participated in. PIPR is run independently by City and Guilds land-based services and has the potential to provide records of an individual's activity.

It can be used for interviews and appraisals and is recommended as a simple way to demonstrate compliance with farm assurance standards. However, discussions with pig producers identified that the concept of continual professional development (CPD) is currently neither widely recognised nor understood by industry.

Improving the industry's understanding needs to become a priority. For the purposes of this document, the simpler term 'professional recognition' will be used. It is hoped it will help develop an attitude of professionalism and pride within the industry.



Delivering the strategy

Embedding skills development into everyday business practice is vital.

The integration and implementation of skills development and professional recognition into every business will help the English pig industry to improve its resilience and competitiveness in a volatile market. The professional workforce can then be recognised and rewarded accordingly, ensuring the retention and future recruitment of quality staff in helping to safeguard the future.

The McDonald Review and the more recent Agri-Tech Strategy consultation both point towards an agricultural industry capable of demonstrating and recognising its skills, both to improve productivity and export potential and prove their professionalism while doing so.

Success of this strategy, and the wider industry, is reliant on a robust partnership with all parts of the supply chain including retail, processing, allied industry, regulators, governments, sector skills councils, learning providers and knowledge transfer organisations.

Recruiting staff

There is a critical need to attract and retain staff who are capable of making the industry a success, yet there is still a stigma attached to pig farming as a career. The image remains of hard work and long hours, for little financial reward.

New recruits will be needed at all job levels and are likely to require higher skills levels than the workers they will replace, as technology advances and they take on more managerial and professional roles. Businesses need to reach out beyond the traditional 'pools' when recruiting.

With a fragmented careers service, young people get advice from a variety of sources. It is, therefore, essential that the industry provides up-to-date information to careers advisors and other influential people to tackle these false perceptions. By demonstrating the professional, highly technical and innovative nature of the industry, which offers the opportunity to grow and develop a career, it will be better placed to attract, motivate and retain staff of high calibre.

The industry is working proactively to improve its appeal to new recruits. In particular, the recently launched NPA careers website offers a mentoring service, provides case studies and lists job opportunities.

This is in addition to the Bright Crop initiative which is working to improve the perception of careers in agriculture by providing a positive image of the industry to school children and careers advisors. The industry is also taking the lead in supporting students at college with a combination of financial support and experience gained through industry placements.

Retaining staff

Recruiting staff will only be worthwhile if the industry and the individual business live up to expectations to provide satisfying employment and empower their staff to take responsibility.

Improving the uptake of 'soft' skills and business management training needs to be prioritised to help businesses implement good staff management. Management training for all people who are responsible for others will help the industry improve retention rates; improved communication will help staff feel more valued.

Businesses which have invested in coaching and mentoring training, along with those which have an annual staff appraisal system in place, see significant benefits to staff morale. It also gives them a different view of the business and can result in new ideas and ways of working which improve the overall productivity of the farm.

Structured training plans for farms will also ensure staff have realistic expectations from the company. These can be in-depth plans based on a training needs analysis or a simple matrix of required tasks and competencies that are checked off when completed.

Rewarding staff

To compete with other industries, businesses must be willing to acknowledge employees' improved skills effectiveness through better reward. This may be financial but alternative incentives, such as flexible working to cater for home commitments, regular weekends off and increased responsibility are also proven tools to retain quality staff.

When using non-financial rewards for staff, highlighting these 'extras' clearly can also motivate staff as they know all the benefits potentially available to them.

By developing and delivering this strategy, which makes a long-term commitment to the improved skills base and professionalism of the English pig industry, the industry can safeguard its future.



Achieving objectives

A time frame for completion of the specific tasks for each objective is shown below in terms of short (year 1), medium (year 3) and long term (year 5) tasks.

1 Recruit: Provide and promote an attractive environment for a progressive career within production and allied industries

- Develop work-based learning opportunities via apprenticeships, on-farm qualifications, etc Medium term
- Produce a clear career structure with transparent development pathways Short term
- Identify industry champions to promote the industry to potential recruits Short term
- Ensure careers advisors/services have up-to-date information about the sector Short term
- Support AHDB Education group to improve information and opportunities available Medium term
- Support industry careers initiatives such as IGD, Bright Crop, Future of Food and Farming and Lantra Medium term

2 Retain: Promote skills development as vital to business improvement

- Maintain a skills offer that is relevant, flexible and accessible at all levels Short term
- Improve uptake of 'soft skills' training to improve staff management skills across the industry Medium term
- Demonstrate and promote the business benefits of investing in individuals Short term
- Identify needs and gaps to be addressed through training within the industry Medium term
- Explore resource opportunities to deliver effective development within the sector Long term
- Develop a tool kit to support structured training within an organisation Short term

3 Reward: Promote recognition of achievement to motivate staff

- Promote the Pig Industry Professional Register as the way to achieve and record professional recognition Short term
- Reward and acknowledge individuals' development, ie Trainee of The Year Award Medium term
- Reward the increasing demonstration of competency through linking to other industry schemes, eg earned recognition Long term
- Develop support for staff recognition, ie benefits statements Medium term

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