

October 2007

Newbattle News

Issue 1

Scotland's Life-Changing College

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Dear Staff and Students,

Welcome to the first edition of Newbattle News. This newsletter will be sent on a monthly basis to keep everyone up-to-date with all the latest news and events happening here at Scotland's National Adult Education Residential College.

It is set to be a busy year ahead, with our 70th Anniversary celebrations just around the corner in December. Read on for an update on how the celebration plans are progressing.

In this issue there is also an update on our work on the redevelopment of Riverside Cottage, a look at our partnership with the Forestry Commission Scotland and an update on conferences and events at the College. We will also hear from our newest member of staff, Gill Turner, who joined us in September as Curriculum Manager.

I hope you are all settling into the new term and looking forward to the year ahead at the College - I know I am!

All the best,

Ann

Ann Southwood, Principal, Newbattle Abbey College

Second Burmese Student Welcomed at Newbattle Abbey College

A link up between Newbattle Abbey College and the Burmese Educational Scholarship Trust (BEST) has enabled a second Burmese political refugee to enrol at the College. The initiative offers Burmese students who have been granted political refugee status the chance to study in Scotland.

Twenty-three year old Sau Aung Thant was jailed for four years in Burma for his political beliefs and fled Burma recently due to escalating violence under the country's oppressive military regime. With help from BEST, Sau is now studying Newbattle Abbey College's Arts and Humanities course.

Sau's story echoes that of former Newbattle Abbey College student Nay Doon, who spent ten years in a Burmese jail for his political beliefs. Nay was released in 2001, but his life was still in danger and he was granted political refugee status in the UK. Nay, 37, also secured a place at Newbattle with the help of BEST and received the Scottish Adult Learning Partnership Award at the College's Award Ceremony in September to recognise his achievements in learning. Nay hopes to become an effective communicator to the Western world about the human rights abuses taking place in Burma.

Nay said: "In my heart, I will always campaign for freedom in Burma. I owe this to the Burmese people, my family and the tutors at Newbattle.

"I understand the importance of education and Burma is desperately in need of educated young people to develop a democracy. I would like to become politically active in the UK so that I can inform people about Burma and the political situation there."



Nay is now studying at Glasgow University, having graduated from Newbattle earlier this year.

70th Anniversary Community Project



Newbattle Abbey College has secured a £50,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to mark 70 years of providing life changing educational opportunities for adults in Scotland. With the funding, we are creating a multi-media exhibition and oral history project for the local community, which will track the social, economic and cultural journey of staff and students since opening in 1937. The exhibition will be unveiled in December as part of the College's official anniversary celebrations and will allow locals to get involved and learn about our rich history, and the educational opportunities available here.

Project Worker Rae McGhee and Research Historian Dr Neil Hargraves have already been appointed alongside the College's resident Historian and Ecologist to hold workshops with former staff, students and local community members, aimed at gathering long-forgotten stories from a broad range of people. Oral history interviews with a range of people connected with Newbattle are due to start in November.

Throughout September / October, we have been working with a range of community organisations whose work will contribute to the final exhibition. These include a community group of local artists, a local youth club who received a guided tour of the College and St David's RC High School Music and Art Departments, who will provide background music for the multi-media exhibition as well as portfolios of Higher pupil's work.

Three resource packs are also being produced for distribution to local schools, community and tourist information outlets, to increase the opportunity for local people to learn about the history of Newbattle Abbey College.

The word is already spreading about the Anniversary locally, with a programme about the history of Newbattle running on the community radio station in September.

70th Anniversary Celebrations

As part of this year's 70th Anniversary celebrations we are planning a formal reception on 14 December for stakeholders and an informal party for staff, present and former pupils and community representatives on 20 December.

At the moment we are still very much in the planning stages for both celebrations. One idea so far is that, for both events, students could lead guests on an interactive tour of the College, using music, drama and storytelling set in the building and the grounds to illuminate the history of the past seventy years. This could incorporate an exhibition of students' work at the end.

We are keen to hear any ideas about this celebration - please see Neil Hargreaves with any suggestions.

Working with the Forestry Commission



We are very fortunate here at Newbattle to have beautiful mature woodlands on our doorstep. In order to maintain this woodland and make the most of its potential for learning, we have been working with the Forestry Commission Scotland since July last year. In that time we have worked on a range of exciting outdoor projects, as well as developed access to and maintenance of the woodland area for the use of staff, students and the local community.

There are two Forest Wardens permanently based here, who manage the woodland area and work with us on a range of outdoor activities, such as last year's Woodland Workshops. These workshops saw parents and children working together in an outdoor environment, which made a very real and very positive impact on them. Last year's residential students also got involved in maintenance work on the woodland, which they really enjoyed - we hope to see the same again this year!

So far, working with Forestry Commission Scotland has reaped a range of benefits for Newbattle, our students and the local community. At the moment, we are looking at other ways in which we can work with them - there is so much potential. In particular, we are working on a Forest-School initiative, to encourage teachers and pupils from local schools to come and use the woodland area as an alternative "outdoor classroom".

In the meantime, we encourage everyone to get to know the woodlands by spending some time exploring them - they are a beautiful, unique resource and we really are very lucky to have them.

Staff Profile: Gill Turner Curriculum Manager

Gill started at Newbattle Abbey College in the new role of Curriculum Manager in September. She is married with three daughters and a grandchild:

Where were you before coming to Newbattle?: I was at Edinburgh's Telford College, where I was a lecturer in the Design and Media team, teaching radio broadcasting skills and PR. I also worked on establishing International and European partnerships there.

How have you found working at Newbattle so far?: I'm enjoying the student-focussed culture here, as well as the energy and buzz around the place. There is a real focus on making a difference, which is quite inspiring - I think it's how education should be. Also looking out into the Italian gardens rather than a slab of concrete is much more pleasant!

What opportunities do you see ahead?: My position at the College is very new so I'm still working that out. But, through my experiences at Telford, I do know that there is lots of funding available for international partnerships, which I am hopeful we may consider applying for at some point in the future.

What did you do before working in further education?: I trained as a nurse and then worked as a microbiologist in the brewing industry for 12 years. After that I gained a BA in Politics and Sociology before moving into teaching.

VisitScotland Grading



The College has been awarded a 2* bed and breakfast grading by Visit Scotland.

Colleges and Universities are graded with the same system as hotels and the highest level the College could hope to obtain is 2*, so this is a tremendous success.

The grading follows extensive work by the Facilities and Housekeeping teams to upgrade the ground floor rooms. This included refurbishment work as well as sourcing new furniture and furnishings.

The grading was based on all aspects of the VisitScotland Inspector's experience at the College - from the initial phone call to make the booking through to check out. The cleanliness, College facilities, customer service and reception signage are just some of the areas which were focused on.

This grading will hopefully increase the number of bed and breakfast guests which are attracted to the College.

New Website

Newbattle's new website is up and running at www.newbattleabbeycollege.ac.uk. It has been ten months in the making, and is designed to reflect what really goes on here. It is also more interactive, with plenty of opportunity for interested parties to get in touch and let us know their views.

The website has five separate areas - Adult Education Courses, Conference and Training, Weddings, About Newbattle and Friends of Newbattle. In the last section, previous students, staff or just people with an interest can get in touch to keep up to date with all the latest news and events.

We encourage everyone to log on and explore the site - there's lots of interesting information there that you may be surprised to learn! There's also a feedback form for any comments you have.

As it is now much easier for us to make amendments to the site, please just pop in to the Admin office and speak to Kenny Bell about any information you would like added.

Events Update

A large number of meetings, conferences and training days have recently been held at Newbattle. We have attracted a great deal of repeat business from Midlothian and East Lothian Councils, Criminal Justice Services and Edinburgh Council Social Work to name a few.

Guests have been very impressed with both the setting and the level of service - particularly Cathy's buffet lunches!

We have also hosted three weddings recently, which have all been great successes. However the decision has been taken to focus on smaller weddings in 2008 and any future weddings will not be permitted to hold a dance in the building.

In order to attract bookings this Autumn and Winter an email flyer aimed at local businesses has been produced. The theme is to attract clients to come in from the cold and enjoy the luxury and warmth of a meeting at Newbattle Abbey.

Stakeholder Dinner

In February 2008, we will be hosting a dinner at the College for senior staff

members, members of the Board of Directors and College Trustees. We will be inviting politicians, key people from the College sector in Scotland, and representatives from the local community and business world. The aim is to spread the word about the good work taking place here at Newbattle, and start to build more support for the College in political, business and community circles.

The dinner will take place in the Drawing Room and the Rt Hon Henry McLeish will be our after dinner speaker. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Shirley Metcalfe.

Campus Development Plans

In 2005 the College and its partners Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian and Midlothian Council commissioned Halcrow Group Ltd to develop a 15 year Masterplan - Development Framework and associated Business Plan for the sustainable development of Newbattle Abbey College and Estate.

This review assessed the College's assets and was finalised in late 2006. Its recommendations were presented to the Board of Directors and College Trustees for consideration during 2007.

We are currently in the process of appointing a Project Manager to implement the findings of the Report and to secure the services of appropriate partners.

This marks the beginning of an exciting phase for the College which will provide a sustainable income stream and allow us to develop and deliver a diverse curriculum, in line with our vision as 'Scotland's Life Changing College'.

Thanks for taking the time to read this newsletter - if you have any feedback, please let Shirley Metcalfe know your thoughts and suggestions.

Kind regards
Ann Southwood

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