

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

RUSKIN MILL EDUCATIONAL TRUST FOLLOWS HOLISTIC GUIDELINES TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN THEIR STUDENTS



→ CELEBRATING DIFFERENCE HAS

long been a way of life for students and staff at the Ruskin Mill Educational Trust (RMET), where equality and diversity have been at the centre of all it does since it began in 1984.

Providing unique residential educational experiences for 16 to 25 year olds with special learning needs, the Trust's three colleges in Gloucestershire, the West Midlands and South Yorkshire sees its students follow individual learning plans crafted according to the holistic principles of Anthroposophy – a spiritual science developed by Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner, in the early 20th century. Every aspect of the RMET's work seeks to integrate 'the head, the heart and the hand'.

'Everything we do is connected because the needs of our students are so diverse,' says Director of Human Resources, Ian Turner. 'The only viable route to equality and diversity is one that recognises how important it is to see education in the context of an individual's whole life. Lots of people talk about the holistic approach. Here we live it every day.'

'If you become more emotionally intelligent, you gain a better sense of yourself and greater respect for the needs of others,' explains Ian. 'Students grow in emotional intelligence as they tackle purposeful, challenging arts and craft-based projects in an inclusive, supportive environment. It's a subtle process, so it's difficult to evidence, but the proof is in the students themselves, who leave RMET better able to meet the challenges of a diverse society.'

RMET students live in small family groups where diversity is the custom; differing needs and house-parents are drawn from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Foreign volunteers who help at the colleges enrich the cultural mix and students often travel abroad for a first-hand feel for life in a different country. 'The students love these trips but they're not on holiday. They're interacting with people, building relationships and learning to respect other cultures,' says Ian.

UNDERSTANDING

To strengthen the Trust's commitment to equality and diversity, staff and students meet regularly as part of the colleges' Equality and Diversity Working Groups. These guide their work together, and see what actions still need to be implemented.

'We're creating a climate where disability isn't seen as an impediment to progress at RMET,' concludes Ian. 'We recognise where and how we can develop capacity and creativity in our staff, our students and in the networks and relationships we build.'

It is this understanding and commitment that keeps Ruskin Mill Educational Trust at the forefront to maximise its students' potential for autonomy and employability.

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

In 1984, Aonghus Gordon, the founder of RMET, discovered that when students with special educational needs work with craftspeople in natural environments on real-life, purposeful tasks, their personal, emotional and social skills, behaviour and health improve dramatically. And it is this simple but provocative observation that remains at the heart of Ruskin Mill's mission. The development of emotional intelligence lies at the core of anthroposophy and is key to promoting equality and diversity at RMET.

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