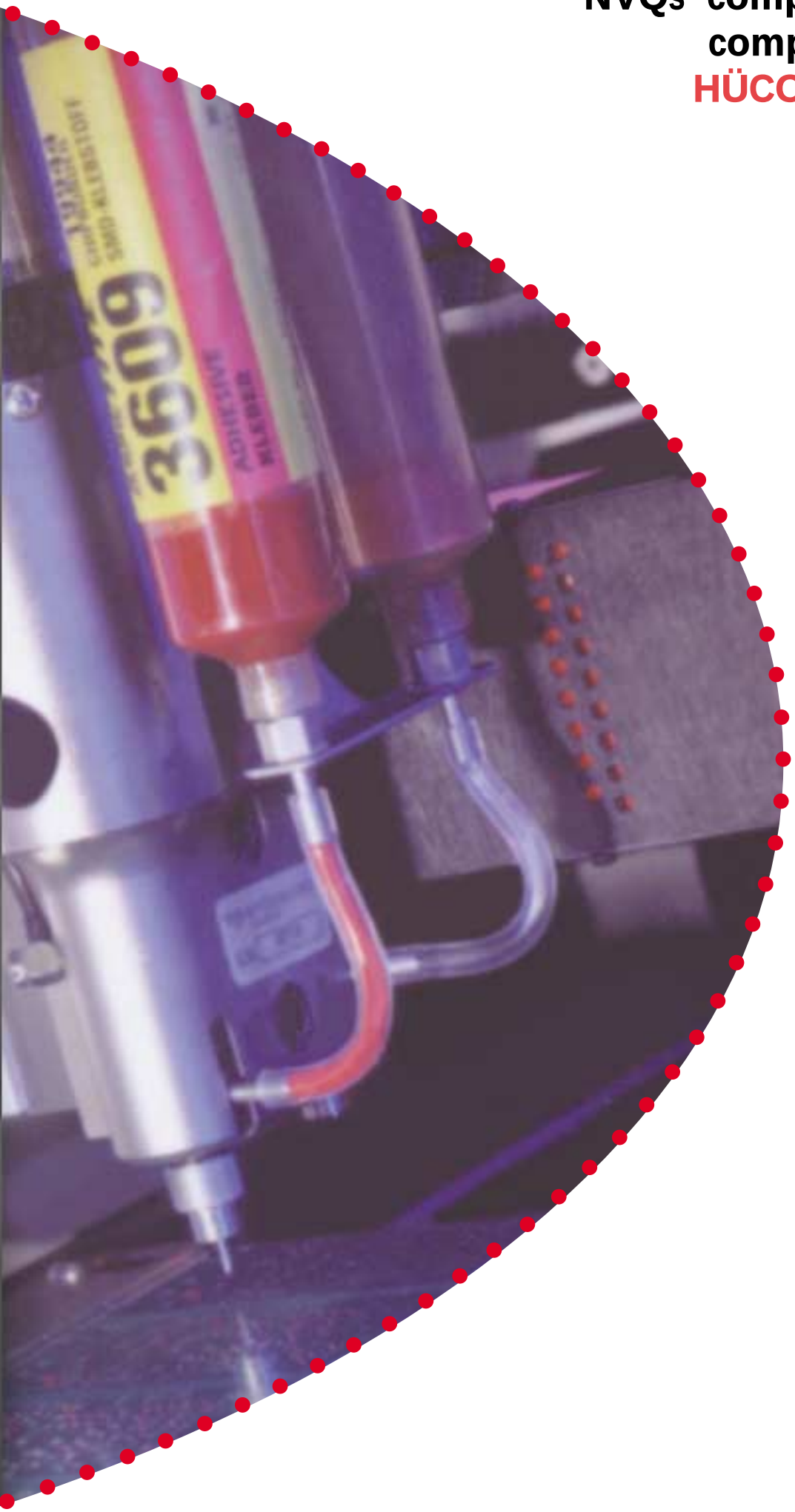
NVQs complete the circuit in company development

HÜCO Lightronic NI Ltd



The Business Benefits

Linda Norris, Human Resource Manager, identified the numerous benefits the company had received from introducing NVQs:

Lower labour turnover

Re-skilling of a workforce from a predominately clothing manufacturing environment

Reduction of learning time required by staff

Improved job performance, less supervision and checking

Contributed to a structured culture of training

Helped to overcome employees' barriers to learning

Supported Investors in People

Contributed to multi-skilling within the organisation

NVQ initially used as a company marketing tool

The full story inside

William Donaghy

HÜCO Lightronic NI Ltd

A vision for the local community, HÜCO is recognised throughout Europe as an established manufacturer of electronic circuits and low voltage lighting. In 1990 they expanded their business into Northern Ireland and set up their factory in an area renowned for its clothing industry.

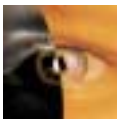
HÜCO is an organisation fully focused on lifelong learning as a means of tapping into the potential of their employees. Not only does the company finance training related to work but also personal development in such areas as aromatherapy and yoga as a means of breaking down the barriers to learning. This enables staff to increase their confidence and reach their learning potential. 83% of HÜCO employees have now achieved a formal qualification since they joined the company ranging from NVQs and other vocational qualifications, to degree and postgraduate qualifications.

HÜCO have established a highly successful partnership with Limavady College of Further and Higher Education, which includes a video conferencing link for staff training. This partnership allows HÜCO to offer both inward and outward training opportunities; inward training for their employees and outward training for the local community i.e. employees' families can return to education with Limavady College and receive reduced fees. HÜCO also provides productive work shadow opportunities to local schools and colleges and accepts trainees into the company for day release in order to provide a practical insight into the world of work.

HÜCO ensures their training and development policy plays an important role in meeting their business objectives. The commitments made in the policy are reviewed during the monthly meeting held by the Training and Development Committee, which is made up of a representative from each level and from each department within the company. One of the ways in which the company demonstrates its commitment and support to staff development is by the Managing Director formally recognising achievements within the organisation. Certificates are presented to the employees at special 'company teas' for all the staff. Production is stopped and the company comes together to celebrate jointly the success of the individual. A specially engraved momento of the achievement is presented, as well as the framed certificate, to the successful trainee.

"The NVQ has played an important role in re-skilling our employees using specific occupational standards designed for our industry."

The NVQ Programme



When HÜCO Lightronic opened its Northern Ireland manufacturing facility in Limavady, the company was an unknown foreign enterprise in an area which has an industrial background largely based in the clothing industry.

From the beginning of its operations, HÜCO has embarked on the training path and indeed was one of the first companies in the area to introduce training to NVQ standards.

In the early days, it was used as a marketing tool to attract people into this new industry by offering a recognised qualification in a new skill.

HÜCO structured their existing training programmes to ensure that they were linked to each unit of the NVQ by providing the underpinning knowledge required. The organisation initially implemented NVQ level 1 Printed Circuit Board Assembly & SMT Assembly as well as NVQ level 3 Administration, Supervisory Management and Injection Moulding. Always focused on the benefits expected, multi-skilling and flexibility are an integral part of the training provided in HÜCO, leading to an occupational qualification which matched the requirements of their employees' new job role. The original set of production related NVQs were obsolete and were replaced in 1998 by the generic Performing Manufacturing Operations NVQ awarded by the Engineering Training Council. The company made excellent use of this change to revisit its existing training programmes. A sub-group of trainers and trainees ensured that the training programmes not only complied with ETC requirements but also took on board suggestions for improvement from the users of the documentation.

HÜCO has gained formal recognition from Engineering Training Council and British Polymer Training Association as an approved training centre for the provision of in-house quality training. Both organisations assess the company at least once a year to ensure it continues to meet their standards of training. All manufacturing assessments are carried out in-house by trained assessors whose work is monitored by the company's internal verifier. The NVQ is fully integrated into the training of all employees and all of those employees are encouraged to take a copy of any work evidence and place it in a file to be transferred to their NVQ portfolio when appropriate.

The organisation is fully committed to training and development and has set aside a specific room where candidates can study before or after work and during lunch times. The 'Learning Zone' is an in-house library containing a wide range of training materials, including videos, audio cassettes, and video conferencing facilities for the employees to widen their knowledge in non-work related topics. The "Learning Zone" also houses the individual portfolio for each member of the team. This portfolio is similar in concept to the National Record of Achievement, whereby all issues pertaining to the training and development of the individual are recorded and stored in the portfolio and it is therefore a "living record" of achievement. Where a course has been identified as being beneficial to the employee and the company, the company will fund the course in full and provide day-release where necessary. The NVQ is funded 100% for staff but discount has also been negotiated for staff families if they want to enrol for a course in Limavady College. All framed certificates are impressively displayed

"HÜCO is aware that their key resource is their employees and they are convinced that developing their employees through the NVQ contributes to the achievement of organisational objectives."

on the factory walls and the employee is given a colour copy to take home. This demonstration of support and commitment by the Managing Director and other managers shows the employees the value that the organisation places on training and development. It is evident that continuous improvement and lifelong learning is the culture in which this Northern Ireland organisation thrives and benefits from.

Employee Benefits

Attainment of a formal qualification

Increased confidence and pride in their work and recognition from the organisation

Visible display of achievement

Committed to company's objectives

The Future

HÜCO Lightronic has matured through the first phase of the NVQs and has recently carried out a comprehensive evaluation of its training programme. Having achieved IiP recognition in January 1999, winning numerous awards for its quality of training, HÜCO is avoiding complacency by restructuring its in-house training system. Indeed in July 2000 HÜCO became one of the small group of companies to be re-assessed to the new IiP standards and specific positive feedback was recorded with regard to changes made to its training system, even if only in small ways. HÜCO is working towards a fully integrated management system combining quality, health and safety, training and environmental management systems. The company completed its ISO9002 accreditation by gaining ISO14001 recognition in December 1999.

All in-house training programmes have been rewritten to reflect the integrated management system as well as satisfy the requirements of the various awarding bodies for NVQs. At present responsibility for identification, delivery and evaluation of training lies largely with the training department but the company is actively working towards delegating responsibility to allow departmental line managers, and in particular team leaders, to identify the training need and ensure the training is carried out. Progress is then reviewed at the formal yearly appraisal, attended by the Training Manager, whilst the interim appraisal will continue to be used to review, and update where necessary, the training needs and progression to date. This will ensure that departmental managers and team leaders are more responsible for implementing staff development and take increased ownership of the training process. The culture of training will always be an important factor, ensuring that HÜCO reaches its organisational objectives by harnessing its key resource - its team members.

For further information on NVQ implementation and general NVQ information please contact:

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