Providing a better administration with NVQs

HM Customs & Excise

The Business Benefits

Northern Ireland Collection Branch of Customs & Excise are enthusiastic about the benefits attributed to the NVQ process:

A structured training programme for new entrants mapped against the NVQ level 2 Administration

Enabled the organisation to measure the added value of vocational training against the traditional training route

Training courses in Customer Service, Information Technology, Training & Development and Management Development linked to relevant national standard

Raised awareness of organisational standards

More professional, competent staff

Departmental objectives met

Investors in People linked into NVQ programme

NVQ worked effectively with Business Excellence Model

The full story inside

Bill Logan

"NVQs have allowed our employees to gain a much wider perspective of Customs and Excise in a structured and logical way."

HM Customs & Excise

The Custom House, Belfast was built between 1854 and 1857 and was designed by Charles Lanyon one of the most important of Irish Victorian architects. Lanyon was responsible for many of the most beautiful buildings in Belfast including Queens University and the Grand Opera House. In 1857 the building was used to house all of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, the Post Office and the Inland Revenue. The newly refurbished Custom House is now the focal point of HM Customs and Excise, Northern Ireland, with staff providing administrative and operational support to their offices in Carne House, Newry, Enniskillen, Coleraine, Londonderry and Aldergrove. One of the areas supported is the Business Advice Unit which offers a service to registered traders and the general public covering all VAT, excise and inland customs matters, handling up to 6000 telephone and 400 written enquiries per month.

Customs and Excise is dedicated to their staff and their Training and Quality Development Unit provides a training service to all staff using some of the most modern training equipment available, including a dedicated IT training suite.

Although the organisation is an extremely busy one it provides employees with the opportunity to develop personal skills while helping local charities. Three of the programmes they support are noted below:

- Development Assignment – this programme is for line managers and it matches the development need of the managers with an operational need of a charity. Customs and Excise release the managers for one day a week for 12 weeks
- Employers Supported Volunteering - this is for team building and is used to relieve pressure within the units. The unit is released for a week to carry out charity work such as painting rooms, building walls and delivering hampers and toys at Christmas.
- Prince's Trust Programme – this is for members of staff aged between 18 – 25. Customs and Excise sponsor members of staff for a 3 month period to work with a local charity. This programme develops interpersonal, team building and leadership skills. All employees who have been on this programme have continued their charity work after they returned to Customs & Excise.

HM Customs and Excise is committed to providing a high quality service to their external customers and all of their staff. The Custom House represents the key role played by this organisation in the economic and commercial life of Northern Ireland. This newly refurbished building is a demonstration of their commitment to continue to play this role for many years to come.

The NVQ Programme

Customs and Excise commenced their NVQ programme in 1996 when they asked for volunteers from their 5 geographical locations in Northern Ireland to pilot different NVQs. After advice from colleagues in England, the Collections Unit decided to become an approved centre from the outset for NVQs in Administration, Customer Service, Management and Training & Development.

A close partnership was established with the External Verifier from LCCI who was able to offer advice and guidance on types of evidence, documentation required and also assist in matching the national standards to job roles.

The Assessors and Internal Verifiers gained their awards through IPD. Each assessor was twinned with another assessor at a different location to ensure that each candidate had an assessor and adviser throughout the process. Progress days were held for all candidates consisting of training and development in the morning and portfolio building in the afternoon.

Over the past 2 years the NVQ process has evolved with employees now requesting an NVQ during their appraisals as they feel the best opportunity for progression is through an NVQ development opportunity. The line manager who manages learning gaps through open learning materials or guided learning packs now manages the NVQ programme. The managers feel that the NVQ actively encourages them to work as a team and promotes the team culture and concept throughout the organisation.

NVQ certificates are presented by the Collector at celebration of achievement days, which are attended by the candidates, line managers, divisional heads and awarding body. NVQ progression and successes are promoted through the Outlook magazine, the company Intranet and Year-end report.

The company recognises that the primary focus of employee development is to enable individuals to fulfil their potential and therefore the investment in training and development contributes to the growth and development of the organisation.

“ Since undertaking the NVQ in Administration our employees have taken responsibility for their own development, while receiving the full support of their line managers.”

Employee Benefits

More awareness of themselves, the team and the department

Development and progression opportunities for employees are more focused

Increased confidence

Enhanced motivation

Better career prospects

The Future

The benefits of structured training linking into NVQs are very evident and the possibility of fully integrating the Administration NVQ into the induction programme, in order to manage the induction successfully, is under discussion. HM Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland will link into a national objective of raising the profile of management and technical standards throughout their organisation.

There will be further promotion of the organisation's Intranet with greater usage of the NVQ site, details of individual progression and standardisation of documentation will be on-line.

HM Customs and Excise will continue to make use of the added benefits of the NVQ process to meet the criteria of the Business Excellence Model thus ensuring that they are seen as a quality organisation in Northern Ireland.

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

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