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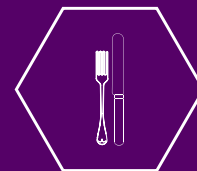


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PARTNERSHIPS
working together - a partnership approach to NVQs





CATERING

Recipe For Success: Newry Institute And Compass

The background

The School of Hospitality and Tourism at Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education has an established record of working with the Hospitality and Tourism industry throughout Northern Ireland to facilitate on-the-job training and assessment for a wide range of NVQs.

Compass is one of the market leaders throughout the UK and Ireland in the provision of high quality contract food and hotel services and operates in 100+ sites in Northern Ireland. In this highly competitive industry, the company continually needs to attract, develop and retain top-quality staff to gain and retain contracts.

In May 1998 Compass approached the School of Hospitality and Tourism with a range of problems which were reflected throughout the food production and food service sector operations and included:

- High turnover of staff at operative level – 30%.

- Low numbers of potential recruits responding to advertised recruitment events.
- High levels of absenteeism, which created a dependency on agency staff and low morale.

The partnership

The initial meetings led Newry Institute and the Compass Group to adopt a partnership approach to addressing these problems with a joint programme structured to suit the particular demands of a business with multi-site arrangements. Newry Institute was to provide continuous training, mentoring and administrative management. The Compass Group would adopt a cascading structure, using Cook Managers to train and assess Assistant Cooks and Service Assistants on-site, supported by mentors appointed by Newry Institute. The focus of the training and development was on multi-skilling, up-skilling and improved customer care skills for the operatives. Compass are committed to benchmarking to national

standards and therefore NVQs were the natural choice for the programme.

The partnership began in September 1998 with a small-scale pilot and incorporated the following objectives into the programme:

- Develop skill levels to maintain a consistent level of performance and encourage recruitment.
- Extend skill flexibility to help overcome skill shortages.
- Develop team spirit within the separate sites to help reduce absenteeism.
- Enhance customer care skills to help retain and expand client contracts.
- Introduce the ethos of lifelong learning to encourage confidence and commitment to the company.

The pilot consisted of 14 Assistant Cooks and 8 Cook Managers at 8 sites. The pilot produced an overall achievement rate of 91% of full

NVQs and D32 units within one year. The success of the pilot was such that the scheme was rolled out to the rest of the business and has continued to expand to over 54 sites within the company.

The structure of the partnership has grown to reflect the expansion of the programme. Compass now has 5 Operations Managers committed to the partnership who meet with the mentors formally on a regular basis and remain in informal contact by telephone and site visits. Team meetings review progress against objectives, timescales and achievement targets set for candidates and assessors. These meetings are also used for standardisation and team development purposes as well as for feedback, future planning and evaluation.

The mentors fulfil a crucial role within the partnership. They deliver the assessor training for the Cook Managers and carry out the site visits, targeting and delivering appropriate training and assessments for Cook Managers and operatives. The mentors support the recording of evidence in a thorough but manageable way. The training sessions have been greatly enhanced with the recent introduction by Newry of lap-tops to facilitate training sessions on CD-Rom.

All on-site meetings are arranged around the demands of the operation and the staff rotas. They are planned once a month between the Newry Institute mentors, Cook Managers and candidates, with targets and activities agreed for both to achieve D32 and NVQ qualifications simultaneously.

The mentors also provide and receive important feedback, informally on site visits and at

the formal management team meetings. The feedback received from candidates is particularly important and it acknowledges the high level of support provided by the mentors and the flexibility provided at on-site visits.

Achievements

The power of this positive partnership between Compass and Newry Institute is illustrated by the increase in candidates achieving NVQs after 1998. Over 168 Compass staff have achieved a nationally recognized qualification through this partnership, with another 51 on board in 2002.

Many candidates have been given the opportunity and the confidence to progress to higher level qualifications on the workbase programme – 18 Cook Managers have progressed from D32 to NVQ level 3 Training and Development. One candidate now travels from Belfast to Newry to complete the Advanced Diploma in Culinary Arts leading to a BSc. International Culinary Arts.

The partnership approach has been highly successful for Newry Institute. The School of Hospitality and Tourism was awarded a Centre of Excellence by the Department of Employment and Learning in recognition of the positive partnerships to meet the needs of the sector. In 2002 there are 169 candidates across a range of companies.

Since 2000 Newry Institute has extended its NVQ partnership model to other Northern Ireland companies with multi-site arrangements:

- School Meals personnel in Belfast Education and Library Board and South Eastern Education and Library Board.

- Catering staff in Four Seasons Healthcare.
- Officers and prisoners within catering in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Compass set out its success criteria very clearly at the start of the partnership. How has the partnership affected these?

- Absenteeism has reduced to 4% compared to 8% sector average.
- Vacancies down by 30%.
- Staff turnover at operative level down to 10% from 30%.
- Second highest level of employee satisfaction within 7 regions of Compass in UK and Ireland.
- Compass now includes the opportunity to gain NVQs when advertising for new staff with a consequent increase in applications of 25% over the last 18 months.

Compass has no doubts about the benefits of working in partnerships.

'Although we have always been supportive of vocational training and development, the success of the current programme is largely due to team effort put in by all parties – Newry Institute with their regular visits to our sites and excellent support from the tutors – the candidates with their enthusiasm for, and dedication to completing the programmes – the Compass Senior Management Team who have wholeheartedly supported the programme, the partnership and the candidates throughout. We have worked together to promote, implement and evaluate the initiative and it has been an ongoing success story for everyone involved.'