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“NVQs link into the Trusts’ commitment to lifelong learning as they offer those who are not professionally qualified an opportunity to enter a pathway towards a nationally recognised qualification”



CARESECTOR

During the late 1980s, government embarked upon a series of important reforms to the National Health Service. These reforms changed the way in which health and social services organisations were managed both nationally and here in Northern Ireland. Among the biggest changes to emerge from this process was the new role given to Health and Social Services Boards - and a different and clearer relationship between them and their front-line care services.

There are currently 4 Boards in Northern Ireland and each Board is divided into Trusts to deliver their services throughout their area. The Boards are responsible for assessing the needs of their respective populations and commissioning services to their Trusts to meet these needs. They are charged with the establishment of key objectives to meet the health and social needs of their population and the development of policies and priorities to achieve those objectives.

There are many key initiatives within the Care Sector which impact on the daily running of the Trusts. Investing in Health, Priorities for Action, Review of Community Care, and the Northern Ireland Charter for Patients and Clients, Employer of Trust Human Resource Strategy and Agenda for Change – Pay

Modernisation in the Health Service are just a few initiatives which by their nature are driving Trusts to change how they deliver care to ensure they meet the needs of their Boards. The Training Organisation for Personal Social Services (now The Northern Ireland Social Care Council) produced the document *A First Class Service* in April 2000 which indicated that 40% of the unqualified Social Care Workforce should be trained by the year 2003.

The following case study looks at how Down Lisburn Trust, the South and East Belfast Trust and Craigavon and Banbridge Community Trust have adopted and integrated a lifelong learning approach to ensure their workforce has the right mix of skills and knowledge to respond to the demand for better services.

Down Lisburn Trust – ensuring employees have their say

Down Lisburn Trust is one of 9 Health and Social Services Trusts within the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area. The Trust is 1 of 4 integrated Trusts in the province which provides both hospital and community services. These include acute hospital care; community mental health services; social care services to meet the needs of people who are elderly, mentally ill, disabled or who have a learning disability



LINDA DAVISON SUSAN BOYCE MARY BOYLE
REPRESENTING THE THREE TRUSTS



and child protection, prevention and adoption services. To meet this wide range of services the Trust identifies and matches peoples' knowledge and competence with the organisation's needs and uses training and development plans to help ensure people match the present and future capability needs of the organisation.

To ensure the views of employees were taken into consideration the Trust introduced a Staff Satisfaction Survey known as *Have your Say* in 1994. The survey was restructured in 1998 in line with the goal of achieving Investor in People status when a clear area for improvement was identified as *"Ensure the development of a Trust wide Training and Development Strategy"*. Through this the Trust introduced a Continuous Improvement Programme, which includes a staff appraisal process intended to identify specific training and development needs of individual members of staff and to form the basis of a Corporate Training and Development Plan.

Return to Learn (R2L)

As part of its commitment to lifelong learning the Trust introduced the Return to Learn (R2L) course in partnership with UNISON. The course is available to

all members of staff but is particularly suitable for staff who have been out of education for a while, have few or no qualifications and lack confidence in their ability to learn. R2L is arranged to fit in with other demands on employees' time and allows them to work at their own pace. They can join a study group which meets every 2-3 weeks during work time and they are provided with their own tutor who offers feedback on the course and general advice and support. Many employees who have participated within the R2L progress to NVQ programmes alongside other Trust employees.

"I have enjoyed this course very much and would encourage anyone thinking about returning to education to try R2L."

"I am better motivated and now when I set goals I can concentrate fully on them. Having not attended school for some time I have got back into the learning aspect of things."

Opportunity Now Group

The Trust realises that there are many factors which impinge on the employees' involvement in lifelong learning and to this effect they have



introduced further measures to support their employees. The Trust has an Opportunity Now Group, "to increase the quality and quantity of women's participation in the workforce", made up of managers from various Directorates who are working towards updating family friendly policies, improving existing child care facilities for staff and assessing training needs and identifying training and development opportunities for women returning to work.

Return to Work Workshop

This workshop was piloted in June 2000. Invitations were sent to staff on maternity leave, due to go on maternity leave or just returned from maternity leave. The workshop covers making staff aware of family friendly policies and advice on child care options to ensure that those returning to work in the Trust can avail of any opportunities for lifelong learning.

Critical Analysis of NVQ Implementation

The Trust has carried out a critical analysis of the commitment, planning and implementation of NVQs within the Trust and in the Strategic Development Discussion Paper (2000 – 2003) they are highlighted as providing a significant framework for the development of the culture of the organisation. The discussion paper singles out NVQs as being one of the strongest features of the Training and Development Strategy, providing a benchmark for the effectiveness of the Trust's policies and practices and contributing to the achievement of numerous quality initiatives e.g. Investors in People, Charter Mark, King's Fund, ISO and the European Quality Model.

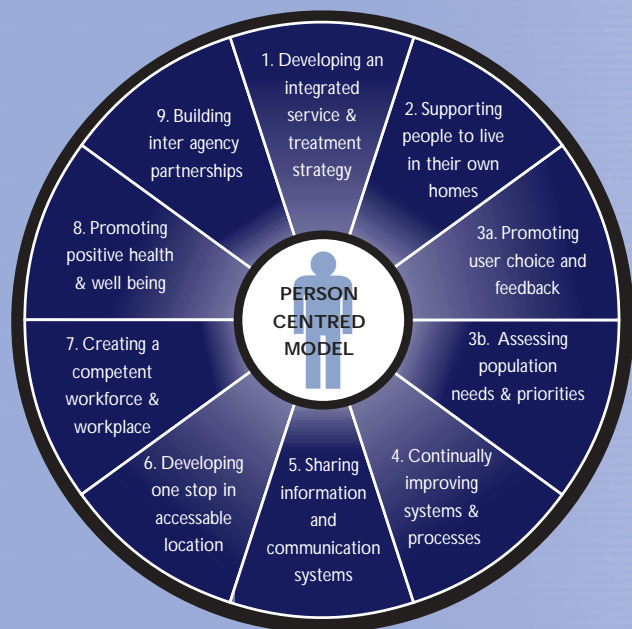
"National Vocational Qualifications provide national recognition and a measure of competence, which allows for progression and movement throughout the Health & Social Services."

Peter Mathias
General Manager - Affinity

South & East Belfast Trust – linking a competence approach into lifelong learning

South & East Belfast Trust provides health and social services to a population of over 200,000 people living in south and east Belfast and Castlereagh. The Trust is committed to bringing care to people and strives for excellence in all services which are provided, and to ensuring that all who use its services are given respect and personal attention and are dealt with promptly. Health and personal social care is changing rapidly, this is driven by a number of factors including a focus on people-centred delivery, changing patterns of care and greater emphasis on value for money. The future of the Trust can only be secured if staff can adapt quickly to change and continue to deliver quality and cost effective services.

The 9 Factor Approach



The South & East Belfast Trust's Corporate Plan adopts a 9 factor approach to bringing care to people. Central to these is the theme of user focus. Adopting a people-centred approach to delivery of services will lead to significant changes in working patterns. Staff need to be supported and equipped for this level of change.



Linking the competence approach into the 9 factor approach

The Trust's Learning & Development Steering Group oversees all training in the Trust and works to ensure that activity supports the Trust's strategic direction as outlined in formal documents such as its Corporate Plan. The Trust's Chief Executive chairs the Group. He strongly supports initiatives to strengthen the Trust's people-centred ethos and improve services.

The Trust believes a lifelong learning approach for all their staff, including administrative staff, is essential to the delivery of quality patient and client care. Building on the skills and competence of all staff is key to a continuous learning approach. National standards and NVQ qualifications provide a framework to enable staff to strengthen levels of skill and competence and facilitate performance management.

The Trust has been at the forefront of piloting NVQs. In 1991 it received an award from the National Association of Health Service Personnel Officers for its work on management competences. It was a regional centre for field trialling standards in advice, guidance and counselling. It was the first public sector body to have a candidate receive a level 2 NVQ in Care. The Trust is building on the

achievements and benefits a competence approach can give to facilitating change.

The Trust believes that lifelong learning can be effectively built into a competence approach, which concentrates on the task in hand. A competence approach is not driven by functional or professional distinctions; it therefore supports multidisciplinary working. Developing the competence of staff to deliver the task in hand improves the service provided and is a public statement of the importance of quality within the Trust.

A competence approach offers many benefits to staff. It equips them for their roles in the Trust, helps them improve the quality of service provided and prepare for change. It links into the Trust's commitment to lifelong learning as it offers those who are not professionally qualified an opportunity to enter a pathway towards a nationally recognised qualification and it offers professionally qualified staff opportunities for continuing personal development.

Career Progression

The Trust has established new pathways for career progression for successful candidates. Care Assistants have been promoted to Senior Carer posts and are now assessors for the NVQ they once took on as a



candidate. Administrative and Clerical staff have been promoted into higher administrative and middle management posts. Many staff have continued their lifelong learning and are now undertaking Professional Nurse and Social Work training. Over the last year opportunities for staff who have achieved NVQ level 2 & 3 in Care have opened up in Nurse Training and in the Employment Based Social Work Diploma course.

The Trust aims to integrate a competence approach into all aspects of its operations and this is being achieved by throughput of NVQs being included in objectives of Senior Managers in the Trust. Senior Managers now become work-based assessors and/or internal verifiers as part of their management role and monitoring arrangements have been developed which highlight work-based assessment and internal verification as good supervisory and management practice.

South & East Belfast Trust Corporate Plan states:

"We will provide staff training and development in line with Corporate needs. A comprehensive competence profile for each role will be developed. These will be kept up to date as a record of each person's ongoing development."

Craigavon & Banbridge Community Trust – ensuring training meets the needs of all concerned

The Southern Health and Social Services Board NVQ Assessment Centre was set up in 1992 to provide NVQs in Care for nursing and care assistants. The centre comprises five partners – Armagh and Dungannon Trust, Craigavon Area Hospital Trust, Craigavon and Banbridge Community Trust, Newry and Mourne Trust and the Southern Health and Social Services Board and is managed by Craigavon and Banbridge Community Trust.

During 1992 – 1995 the focus of the centre was to establish systems and procedures to enable the delivery of NVQs, however in 1996 the Management Board placed a more strategic focus on NVQ development to ensure the Trusts were using national vocational standards to their greatest advantage. As a result, over the past 5 years NVQs have been expanded into other occupational areas and the centre now has approval to offer a wide variety of NVQs.





NVQs – an opportunity for unqualified employees to participate in lifelong learning

The Craigavon and Banbridge Trust acknowledges NVQ training as an opportunity for many of the unqualified workforce to achieve an accredited qualification and take the first step along the route of lifelong learning. The Trust has been very pro-active in promoting this and specially designed leaflets and flyers are forwarded to all eligible staff within their pay slips. Coffee mornings or awareness sessions are also arranged in each Trust area to provide information on the NVQ process and provide opportunities for staff to seek information advice and guidance regarding training.

Due to the many initiatives impacting on the eligible NVQ workforce Craigavon and Banbridge Community Trust revised their NVQ strategy to actively seek, support and train much greater numbers of the social care workforce. The change of strategy has resulted in the Trust exceeding the targets set by the Personal Social Services, for 40% of the unqualified social care workforce to be trained by the year 2003, with 54.5% of the Trust's eligible NVQ workforce trained to date.

Training and development of employees in order to improve the quality of care and its delivery continues to be the main focus of the Trust. Lifelong learning for all staff to enhance skills but also to improve staffs' confidence is seen as a key factor to successful

service delivery. Furthermore, empowering staff and presenting opportunities for them to evaluate their current practice and identify their own learning needs, in conjunction with in-service training provision, has created a highly motivated workforce and confirmed the value of staff to the organisation.

Confirmation of the importance the Trust has placed on the provision of NVQs for staff can be clearly seen by the resources deployed into the training programme itself and staff are released from the workplace to undertake such training. NVQ induction, value base, communication and vulnerable adults training are but a small part of the much wider training programme encompassed in this lifelong learning process.

The fact that NVQs are seen as the cornerstone of training suggests in itself that the initial training is a step towards lifelong learning and line managers seek through supervision and appraisal to encourage staff to continue their learning. Over the past two years the advantages of NVQ training has been clearly demonstrated with many staff moving into more senior posts or having the necessary skills and qualifications to enable them to be seconded to work in other caring departments, further enhancing their skills and ability.

Focus groups which are held with the candidates to evaluate the NVQ programme indicate that the candidates feel that they are better practitioners as they are carrying out their jobs to the required national standard. This shows that their involvement in lifelong learning affects not only the person but the organisation concerned.

“Best Practice Best Care introduces a framework and legal duty in relation to the delivery of health and social care. There will therefore be a requirement to ensure all vocational staff are working to an acceptable standard. The vehicle for achieving this standard is currently NVQ level 2.”

**Southern Health and Social Services Board
NVQ Strategy 2002 -2005**



Supporting the Workforce

The 3 Trusts ensure that all employees receive visible support for their learning through structured time for training, assessment and feedback on their progression from both their assessors and managers. Achievement of candidates is celebrated by the 3 Trusts by high profile award ceremonies when the candidates and their partners are invited to a presentation and supper, certificates are presented by either the Chairman or Chief Executive of the Trusts and all those involved in the NVQ process are cordially thanked for their support and commitment to NVQs which are seen as the cornerstone of training for all the workforce.

The Importance of Lifelong Learning

The 3 Trusts have extensive NVQ programmes ranging from level 1 in Portering to level 5 in Management; other areas include Care, Administration, Information Technology, Customer Service, Food Preparation and Cooking, Hospitality, Training and Development. All 3 Trusts are committed

to the use of NVQs to aid staff development, promote good practice and support lifelong learning throughout all areas in the Trust.

The Trusts realise that lifelong learning can link into their search for continuous improvement in the quality of their services. They place the emphasis on creating an environment in which learning and personal development is matched to the needs of their organisations and reflect the values within their Corporate Plans.

The Trusts also realise that lifelong learning plays an important role in the development of individuals and they encourage participation for all through the creation of a culture of experimentation, empowerment and orientation of change, which gives individuals the confidence to participate while being actively supported by the Trusts.

"We want to create a culture in the NHS which celebrates and encourages success and innovation – a first class service."

Quality in the new NHS

