

# Extern - targeting social exclusion

## People make the difference - using competence to develop staff & improve business performance

Extern is a charitable voluntary sector service provider. The organisation works with children, adults and communities affected by social exclusion through programmes delivered locally and directly to clients. Programmes are delivered throughout Ireland mostly under contract to statutory organisations.

The Extern Organisation recognises that staff are its most important resource and that one of the best ways to invest in this resource is through a planned and professional approach to learning and development.

To this end Extern is committed to providing support and promoting lifelong learning and development for all its staff. By doing so Extern will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of individuals, teams and the service delivered to clients, their families and carers. Historically Extern has been involved in NVQ development primarily as a tool for enhancing the competence, confidence and employability of clients. In particular, NVQs in catering, french polishing and upholstery have been offered for clients recently released from prison or accommodated in one of Extern's hostels.

The extension of NVQs to staff encountered initial difficulties as a consequence of:

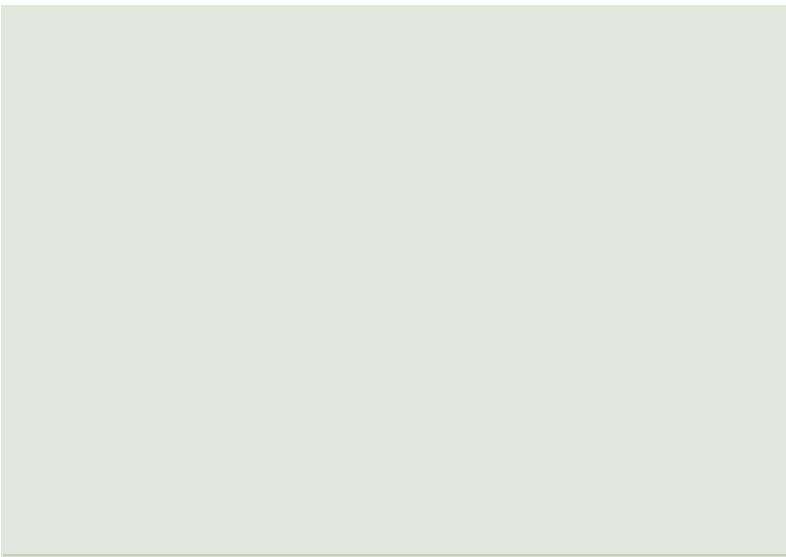
- The generic nature of available NVQs and the specialist roles staff performed
- The lack of on-site assessors to sustain progress and motivation
- The lack of application of NVQs to roles within the organisation
- The perceived bureaucracy and complexity of NVQs
- No obvious reward or recognition for achievement

Extern has learnt from these initial difficulties and the recent renaissance of NVQs for staff has been as a consequence of addressing these issues, senior management commitment, generous support from Social Services Inspectorate and a Personal Social Services Training Strategy that emphasises NVQs.

The competence based approach to staff development has coincided with the development of a competence framework for the organisation. NVQs enable staff members to meet internal competence requirements appropriate to their role.

Subsequent to a recent comprehensive review of all its operations Extern has developed a competence framework for all staff and operations. The framework incorporates six core competences to be used as a foundation for benchmarking and measuring organisational performance and as a basis for reward.

- Providing quality services to meet needs
- Planning and managing work effectively
- Building positive relationships & communication
- Managing resources efficiently
- Promoting effective people management
- Enabling staff to develop



Each of these areas was further sub-divided until a basic framework emerged that identified all the composite parts of each of the broad headings.

Currently Extern utilises a range of NVQs in staff development and assuring competence

### NVQ Level 3-5 in Management

It is organisational policy that staff with management responsibilities attain an NVQ appropriate to their level of responsibility i.e. level 3 for co-ordinators, level 4 for project managers and level 5 for senior managers. Working with the Beeches Management Centre in Belfast, 29 out of 34 managers are currently participating in, or have completed, a Management NVQ.

This award quality assures management with regard to contracts, enables management development and allows Extern to plan succession and project development based on available management resources.

### NVQ 2 and 3 in Care or Working with Children and Young People

In common with most voluntary organisations Extern has a lot of 'frontline' staff with few qualifications. This year they developed a Level 2 programme for 13 staff to begin the process of qualifying all staff working directly with clients. In the WHSSB Extern have engaged in a partnership with a local FE College to begin qualifying project staff in Extern West. This initiative has begun with 9 staff members.

Many Extern staff have perceived NVQ attainment as way of enabling access to professional social work programmes. Extern wishes to encourage this for those who are able. To this end they are piloting using Open University courses which will be units of a Social Work Degree as underpinning knowledge courses for NVQ levels 3 and 4 in Working with Children and Young People.

Once again this quality assures the service, enables staff members to embark upon a ladder of opportunity and development and reduces staff

turnover. The latter is important as staff mobility is very high at this level within this sector.

### Assessor and Verifier Awards

One of the reasons for past failure in NVQs in Extern was the lack of availability of assessors to drive attainment. In order not to repeat this mistake the organisation is currently engaged in a programme of Assessor training. In order to encourage staff members to become assessors and verifiers and speed up assessment Extern have recently proposed additional payments for such staff in recognition that this role will be additional to existing workloads.

*'The future of NVQs in bright in Extern and we look forward to a time when we will be self sustained in NVQ provision, all managers will be qualified and all "frontline" staff will be engaged or have attained an NVQ.'*

**Lynne Stevenson**  
HR Manager

