

McMullen Architectural Systems

McMullen Architectural Systems is a specialised sub-contractor within the construction industry. Based in Moira, the company employs 116 people. It designs, manufactures and installs architectural aluminium curtain walling and window frames for large commercial projects, within NI, Rol and GB.

McMullen is fully committed to workforce development. Training and developing the workforce are priority issues for the organisation.

'Training is essential for both the individual and company to maintain a competitive advantage and to keep a sense of pride in what we do. It allows us to raise our standards to a level where we are differentiated from all, bar the very best of our competitors. We encourage training at all levels where it meets the Company's overall objectives or where it helps to develop the individual. Introducing Glass Qualifications Authority (GQA) NVQs have allowed us to provide flexible and relevant training at a time convenient to the business. This will allow us to continue to deliver ever better value to the customer.'

Ted McMullen
Managing Director

As part of its growth strategy, the company recognised that training should become more focused on the needs of the business and on where improvements were necessary to further the success of the company. They also wanted their employees to have accredited training that would be nationally recognised and would demonstrate to customers that they believed in the importance of investing in their employees.

Offering qualifications to their employees and being involved in assessing the skills of their own staff offered the most natural solution and it was decided that NVQs would provide McMullen with a more experienced and skilled workforce. The NVQ programme developed meant that fabricators could have the opportunity to gain national qualifications as part of normal training and achieve external recognition for their existing skills and knowledge.

The organisation developed their NVQ Strategy with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and became a joint approved NVQ centre with CITB Northern Ireland, forming the CITB NI Partnership @ McMullen Architectural Systems.

Human Resources Manager Orla Rafferty led the implementation of NVQs. Assessors were selected and trained from within the company and supported by CITB NI. The in-company assessors and a pilot group of NVQ candidates successfully achieved their individual GQA NVQs and the in-company NVQ implementation success was quickly disseminated to other fabricators and installers.

McMullen now has 6 assessors and 1 internal verifier and over 17 fabricators and 6 site employees have completed an NVQ level 2 and others are working towards it. Over the coming years the company aims for the majority of their site and factory based employees to hold relevant GQA NVQs.

Although getting started and maintaining the momentum was not easy for McMullen the spin-offs from the NVQ programme have been worthwhile. The company felt it was important to get the employees really interested in their learning and the fact that there was a qualification at the end of the process made it worthwhile. McMullen's commitment to learning has not stopped there; they introduced CNC machines within the factory and then saw there was the need to equip the fabricators with IT skills. A number of fabricators went on to gain IT qualifications.

The contracts manager/assessor completed his NVQ level 3 in Fenestration Installation and Surveying as he wanted to have first hand experience of completing an NVQ. This enabled him to have a fuller understanding prior to assessing others and he is continuing his own development by registering

on the NVQ level 5 in Construction Management.

'Having NVQs has many benefits to us as a company; we have a workforce much more aware of health and safety who are adaptable, flexible, focused therefore improving production, efficiency and the quality of our products. Having NVQs as a training programme gives the company the competitive edge when recruiting new employees and retaining high calibre people. All new recruits have to undergo training. We can now offer a structured training programme for our trainees with the ability to set clear performance standards having identified training needs and assessment.'

Orla Rafferty
Human Resources Manager

NVQs have provided a cost-effective method of training, training that is in-house and flexible and fits in with production requirements. The investment in workforce development continues to pay dividends. With an increase in business turnover McMullen has now put in place proper foundations for growth to double turnover within three years. Money has been invested into increasing capacity and improving staff working conditions. Summer 2003 saw the opening of a new purpose built office block and completion of a factory extension. From 1998 McMullen increased production levels without increasing the number of production employees and by January 2002 the organisation had entered the GB market and increased GB market share to 1/3 of turnover.

McMullen has demonstrated its commitment to training and developing of all its employees by achieving the Investors in People Award in October 2001 and 2003. The company has also achieved the NI Construction Excellence Award in Training, the NI Regional Training Award and NI Special National Training Award in Management Development.

McMullen is a quality conscious company and has achieved ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 14001:1996. The Aluminium Training Alliance has recognised McMullen Architectural Systems Ltd as one of a limited number of Centres of Excellence linked to their work on upgrading the standards of their workforce via the implementation of GQA NVQs.

'Being at the forefront of NVQ training in our industry is a key part of the company's strategic plan to improve quality and productivity, whereby we improve and strengthen our relationship with key customers and achieve our plans for future growth.'

Ted McMullen
Managing Director



