

Huhtamaki (Portadown) Ltd

Huhtamaki (Portadown) Ltd is a plastic packaging manufacturing company employing 220 people and is part of a world wide group consisting of 15,000 employees. Huhtamaki's goal is to become 'packaging experts', providing advice and support to customers on the packaging 'solutions' they require.

A customer/quality ethic has long been established throughout the organisation and an ongoing objective for the company is to continuously develop its quality processes.

Unlike many companies facing high staff turnover Huhtamaki has a low level of turnover and has a large proportion of employees with several years service and experience. In planning its workforce development programme therefore the company was concerned with assessing what skills already existed and on improving and developing skills to the high standards required. NVQs are particularly useful in confirming existing skills and knowledge and providing gap-analysis for planning training. Huhtamaki has used NVQs as the backbone of its workforce development programme and particularly for up-skilling employees within its Manufacturing Department.

'The NVQ Programme has helped underpin the skills of our people. It has been an invaluable tool to measure the skill levels of our operators against a standard and we have then been able to upskill by working through their weakest areas with them. Because the programme also gives a recognised qualification the buy in from our people was easier to get.'

Mr Neil Collins
Operations Manager

Competence-based NVQ standards have contributed to the development of the Huhtamaki Manufacturing Department's performance through the introduction of the 'core competences' of health and safety and quality, along with the refinement of procedures used in start-up, control and shut-down of production. Process skills and routine maintenance skills are also developed, the ultimate objective being the achievement of maximum flexibility within the Manufacturing Department in order to better meet customer requirements.

Huhtamaki adopted a process of job analysis using the Polymer Awarding Body (PAB) standards as a benchmark. The industry standard specifications developed by PAB provided guidance and enabled gap-analysis and this informed Huhtamaki's subsequent choice of specific NVQ programmes. The NVQs offered flexibility through optional units and this made them relevant to Huhtamaki and in particular to the Manufacturing Department.

An implementation strategy and in-company assessment model for the introduction of manufacturing NVQs was developed and a pilot scheme involving 22 candidates was rolled out. This allowed lead time for the development of NVQ standards and the training and briefing of all NVQ team members. Once the pilot plan was running smoothly, the decision was taken to roll out NVQs to the remaining 105 production operators.

All training and assessment of NVQs is undertaken by company employees, on site, at a time to suit the company. The assessors are mainly leading operators in the Manufacturing Department. These assessors have a pivotal role in terms of ensuring that candidates have the information, training and support necessary to achieve their NVQ.

A high priority is placed on communication and to this end it has been ensured that all NVQ team personnel have access to computers and email and an 'NVQ Intranet' has been created to allow easy access to NVQ training and assessment materials.

Regular NVQ team meetings are also held. This networking system enables a forum for the exchange of ideas encouraging mutual support to be established. It also assists the planning and allocation of resources as required and the reviewing of progress.

Huhtamaki evaluates the impact of the NVQ programme on an ongoing basis to determine whether the project is accomplishing its objectives. These include increased output, improved quality, cost savings, time savings, increased customer satisfaction and increased employee satisfaction. The company also undertakes benchmarking of NVQ development against that of other companies in the same sector and this informs and improves the assessment process.

The NVQ system of assessment itself has ensured that skills and knowledge gained through training have been transferred successfully to the employee's day-to-day work, impacting directly on the running costs of the organisation. Using the explicit statements of performance within the NVQ, Huhtamaki is confident that employees know exactly what is expected of them, that training is targeted to meet real needs and that training results in performance improvement on the job. Also, as the standards within the NVQ are not linked to any particular training or learning programme, both in-company and external training can be used as well as a wide range of training methods.

Competence-based learning and assessment, using NVQ standards, has become so valued by the company that a new grading and reward structure has been developed to reflect attainment of competence through completion of all of the NVQ units within the programme. A further spin-off is planned with the development of an integrated system of competence-based recruitment, training needs analysis, human resources planning and performance appraisal. NVQs will also be used to set benchmarks for quality as they are recognised by BS EN ISO 9000, 2000 and Investors in People.

With such a leading-edge approach to competence-based performance management, Huhtamaki is set to realise its goals and take its workforce and customers into a successful future.



