

A first for Northern Ireland – NVQ Ductwork through APL

Sharpe Ventilation Services' primary function is the manufacture and installation of sheet metal ventilation systems. The Managing Director, Albert Hamilton, is the current chair of the NI HVCA Ductwork Employer's Forum and has for a number of years worked towards the goal of establishing a flexible provision for the training on ductwork erectors within NI.

Prior to the introduction of this NVQ in Ductwork there was no provision in NI for either apprenticeship or existing entrant vocational training in this area.

This resulted in employees engaged within this occupation being unable to attain qualifications to support employment. Local employers were therefore unable to compete with UK companies as increasingly tenders require companies to demonstrate that their services will be undertaken by a competent and fully trained workforce.

The main challenge within this sector in NI was to provide opportunities for experienced workers, without formal qualifications, to obtain or update a Skill Card by working towards an NVQ Level 2 or Level 3 in Ductwork. To facilitate this process SummitSkills in partnership with HVCA (Heating and Ventilation Contractors

Association) developed candidate and assessor packs which could be used to assess the prior learning of the experienced workers and accredit them with a level 2 or 3 NVQ in Ductwork.

Implementation and Integration

The implementation process was carefully planned with the external verifier working alongside SummitSkills to clarify the NVQ structure and clearly detail the assessment and portfolio methodology.

Process

- Initial meeting scheduled with employer to ensure NVQ is integrated into the organisation
- Induction meeting scheduled with the candidate and assessor to identify the candidates experience and assessment matrix completed
- Assessment programme agreed

- On site assessment commenced (minimum of 2 visits)
- Ask the candidate questions from question bank covering the element PCs of the action plan to prove knowledge.
- Provide an action plan for the candidate to build a portfolio
- Additional training requirement identified and delivered
- Portfolio preparation
- Portfolio review
- External Verification
- Certification of NVQ

On award of the NVQ Ductwork the candidates then is registered as an occupational competent skilled worker through the HVCA.

The duration of the provision is tailored to each candidate's ability, areas of strength and weakness are identified within the initial assessment process and a structured training plan is developed to supplement each candidate's experience as required.

A minimum of 4 visits are completed for each candidate; initial assessment; onsite assessment and portfolio review. The first candidate has been able to achieve his level 2 qualification within 12 weeks.

Benefits to the organisation:

With increased competition from companies outside NI who have had the opportunity to develop a trained workforce, local companies within the Ductwork sector now have the ability to gain recognition for the skills level of their existing workforce through APL, while addressing skills gaps, therefore increasing the skills and productivity of their entire workforce. Companies who avail of this process will have the skills to exploit the opportunities relating to work in both England and ROI due to the lack of a suitably qualified workforce.

Future Developments:

The establishment of Plumbing and Mechanical Services Training NI, ensures that the workforce development will become a sustainable provision which will continue to support local ductwork employers; currently another 6 candidates

are ready to be enrolled on the APL scheme. Through the APL scheme there is also the capability to train in-house company workplace assessors to support ongoing training and assessment within the workplace within individual organisations.

The Candidate's Story

Brian Smyth is currently a Ductwork Erector having progressed from a sheet metal work background onto the role of helper. After several years Brian had developed a high level of both practical skills and management of clients, but without the formal recognition of this skills Brian could not be recognised as a competent operative. With the support of his Managing Director Brian commenced his NVQ in Ductwork through APL and completed the process within a 12 week period, becoming the first candidate in NI to complete this award. Brian commented:

“The process was simple and user friendly it focused on the skills I already had and provided support on inspection and testing, the one to one assessment allowed me to relate my skills to the qualification”

Brian in undertaking the qualification has already been identified as a key team member and as well as an initial financial benefit in terms of a higher salary grade it has highlighted his future potential for development within the company. Brian will continue to operate as a ductwork erector but will progress to the supervision of future jobs and teams of erectors

Brian has now moved on to the NVQ level 3 to develop his skills further within the company.

The introduction of this Ductwork NVQ was a win-win situation for both Brian and Sharpe Ventilation with the Managing Director commenting:

“The NI Industry is consistently faced with raising the skills of the existing workforce to compete with competition from GB and ROI companies and Sharpe Ventilation Services is committed to raising the skills levels of our workforce.”

This innovative practice confirms Sharpe Ventilation Services' commitment.



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