

Toughglass

Toughglass was established in 1989 and specialises in the manufacture of flat and curved toughened safety glass for products in the architectural, automotive, shower, refrigeration display and household fixtures industries.

From their base in Northern Ireland, Toughglass currently provide a regular delivery service to customers throughout Ireland and the UK and have recently expanded their distribution network throughout Europe. Providing a fast, regular but flexible delivery service to the client is a top priority for the company. Its highly efficient production team works with clients at all times to ensure that set targets, budgets and important completion dates are met. Training and development of employees plays an important role in Toughglass. In order to facilitate successful company expansion, the company develops the skills of both existing and new employees in line with the business objectives of the company.

This commitment to workforce development was recognised when Toughglass became an Investor in People company in November 1999 and were re-accredited in December 2002. In 2001 they also achieved a National Training Award. The company is confident that the NVQ programme contributed greatly to this quality award.

Toughglass's NVQ programme covers the entire workforce, from management to HGV drivers and includes all production operatives on the factory floor. The NVQs in use within the company include:

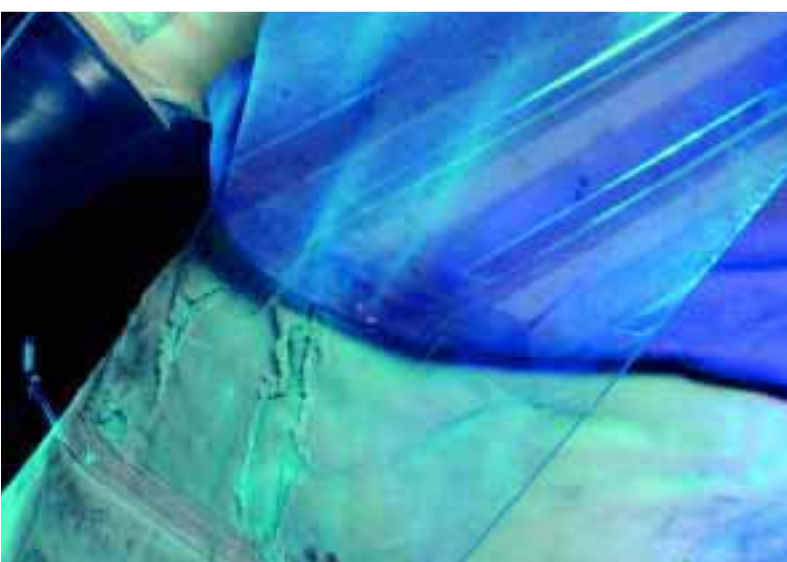
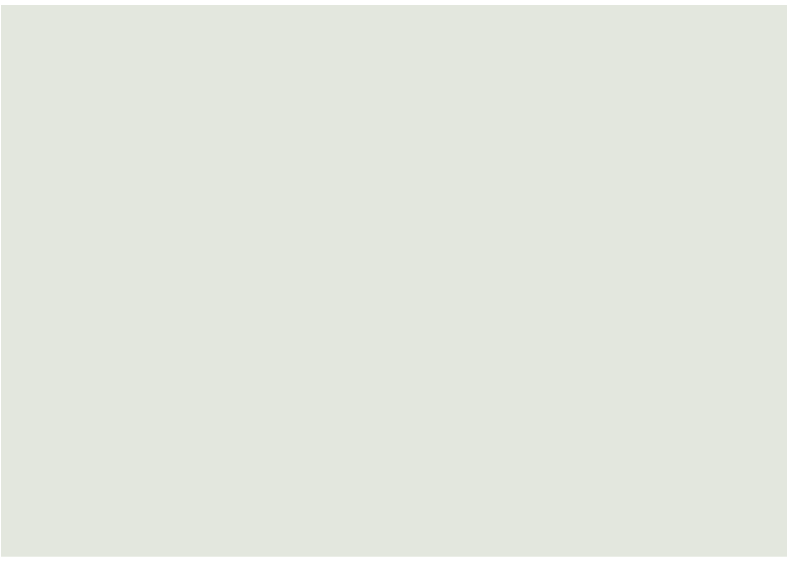
- NVQ levels 2 & 3 in Glass Processing
- NVQ levels 3 & 4 in Management
- NVQ level 2 in Team Leading
- NVQ level 2 in Transporting Goods by Road

Like many companies in Northern Ireland, the workforce in Toughglass come from very different backgrounds in terms of work experience and levels of education and there are many skill gaps to be addressed. The introduction of NVQs gave Toughglass a framework against which the different levels of competences required throughout the organisation could be identified and gaps were then addressed through more targeted training and assessment.

In a recent workforce development initiative, NVQs were introduced to develop team leaders. The company initially decided to develop this group of people through a series of training sessions but it became apparent that this method was not providing as formal a structure as anticipated. The NVQ in Team Leading provided a more structured approach to the development of team leaders and a more formal and structured approach to the training sessions. Furthermore, the flexible approach of the NVQ suited the company in a number of ways.

Firstly, the team leaders were at different levels of competence and experience, in that some of them had worked their way up from production operatives within the factory and others had come up through the Modern Apprentice scheme that the company runs. The NVQ approach was able to be tailored to meet individual competence and experience levels. Also, team leaders were on different shifts from each other and it was not always practical or appropriate to bring them together for training sessions. The training and assessment for the NVQ did not require the same degree of group activity.

All training in relation to the qualification is carried out in-house, either in partnership with an external consultant who covers agreed areas for training and development, or by the company's training officer. Also, an e-learning centre has been opened on the company's premises which allows access at all times for employees who are completing courses that are both work or non-work related. The spin off from the introduction of the e-learning centre



is that employees involved in the team leading NVQ are completing performance management, leadership and one to one training courses on-line as part of their training in relation to the NVQ. At the same time they are developing their computer skills; this is of particular benefit as some employees had not even switched on a computer prior to this.

Toughglass found that the Team Leading NVQ stretched the team leaders to their full potential and one of the most beneficial aspects introduced by the company through the NVQ process was that of mentoring. Mentoring encouraged employees and particularly this group of team leaders to reach their potential by helping them to tease out evidence, discuss any issues and promote best practice within the organisation.

Moreover, the team leaders now have more responsibility and play an active role with regard to health and safety and risk assessment, which ensures that legal requirements are met. Due to this added responsibility in managing health & safety and their ownership of this area of work there has been a significant decrease in accident rates. The team leaders' supervisory role has also increased and they are now delivering team briefs and carrying out performance appraisals and assessments within their teams.

Overall the NVQ for team leaders has proved invaluable to Toughglass. The company has gained a skilled group of individuals who have used their training to take on more responsibility and to improve company performance, with the added bonus of a nationally recognised qualification.

John Agnew, the Managing Director of Toughglass, is very supportive of the NVQ programme and he has been at the forefront of ensuring that there is an effective communication strategy in place to make certain all employees are aware of the opportunities and benefits surrounding the NVQ process. The company is very proud of its employees and regularly hosts a Training Awards Night to recognise achievements.

Toughglass is committed to workforce development through the NVQ process, and the company will continue to develop its employees in the future to ensure they meet the demands of their marketplace.

'By understanding our customer needs and developing our workforce accordingly we are perfectly positioned to exceed the expectations of increasingly demanding markets.'

John Agnew
Managing Director