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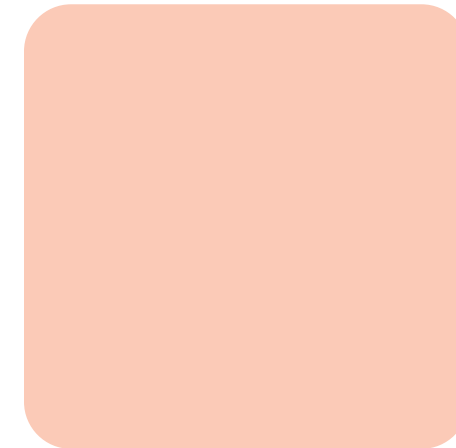
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Skills North East - The Regional Skills Partnership Innovative Workplace Learning in the North East



The Regional Skills Partnership is chaired by John Cuthbert, Managing Director of Northumbrian Water Ltd. Other partners include: Association of Colleges, Association of Learning Providers, Association of North East Councils, Business Link, Confederation of British Industry, Government Office for the North East,

Higher Education Funding Council for England, Jobcentre Plus, Learning & Skills Council, North East Assembly, North East Chamber of Commerce, One NorthEast, Skills for Business Network, Small Business Service, Trades Union Congress, Universities for the North East.

Skills North East Vision
"The North East will be a region where employers, individuals, communities and government collectively invest in the development of skills and businesses to contribute to the delivery of sustainable economic success and social justice."

The Partners of Skills North East are committed to ensuring that:

“The North East will be a region where employers, individuals, communities and government collectively invest in the development of skills and businesses to contribute to the delivery of sustainable economic success and social justice.”

Foreword

The future skills levels of this region depend upon organisations like those featured in this publication. They have taken work-based learning and looked at it from a new perspective. Whether this has involved innovative new approaches to learning, unusual collaborations, or simply a different way of working, these organisations have one thing in common. They all understand the importance of skills development, to support economic growth and inclusion.

The size of this challenge must not be underestimated. The North East continues to under perform relative to the rest of the UK across a range of indicators including levels of productivity, business start-ups, business survival, innovation, employment and the achievement of higher level skills.

We have made significant progress in recent years with skill levels increasing and unemployment falling and there is some evidence that we are beginning to 'narrow the gap' with the UK on a number of fronts, including employment growth, productivity, and average earnings. We must rapidly build upon these signs of progress if we are to continue developing a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive regional economy.

The employers, providers and public agencies featured in this publication are effecting change at grass roots level. It is this type of activity that induces attitude change, something that is essential if we are going to continue to narrow the skills gap.

The importance of skills to increasing our economic performance is significant and through the case studies showcased in the following pages it is clear that there are many organisations that already subscribe to this view.

The Regional Skills Partnership - Skills North East - has an important role in transforming attitudes towards learning and developing a highly skilled workforce to underpin a high performing economy. The providers, employers, agencies and individuals highlighted here are making a reality of this role. It is therefore heartening to read these case studies which I hope will inspire more organisations to move the skills issue further up their agenda.

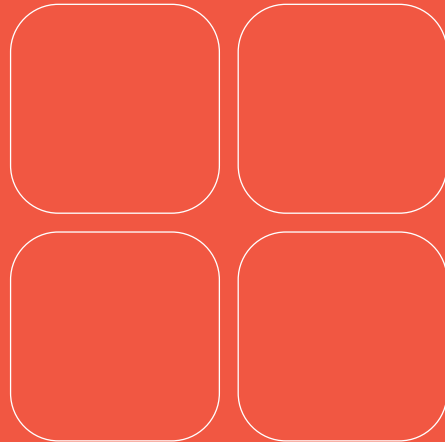


John Cuthbert

John Cuthbert
Managing Director,
Northumbrian Water Ltd
and Chair, Regional Skills
Partnership

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Ashington High School in Northumberland caters for over 1000 pupils aged 13-18. The school was designated a specialist sports college in 2001 and a high performing specialist school in 2006. The school employs over 100 staff who are involved in both teaching and support activities. All staff work between 20 and 37 hours a week.

Ashington High School and Star Consultancy

Case Background

Ashington High School became eligible for funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for support staff who wished to take part in a new scheme studying for an NVQ Level 3 in Business and Administration on work premises. Learning and development is actively encouraged amongst staff at Ashington High School and training is available to all of their staff. Within this learning culture the new scheme proved popular and seven members of staff took part in phase one of the training.

The Innovation

Introducing flexible, accredited work-based learning for school support staff.

The Project

The NVQ students were supported by Ann McPhee of Star Consultancy. Running her workshops on the premises enabled staff to fit the learning in around their existing duties as it only involved taking an hour off work at a time.

Ann held her workshops once a week and the school staff constructed a rota so they could spend time going through qualification requirements and the work that was needed to achieve it.

The NVQ ran alongside the support staff's day to day jobs and they were able to use examples of their work as evidence for the NVQ. The course was very flexible and, because of this, each member of staff was able to work at their own speed with an individual work plan dependent on their other commitments. Ann was able to give individual support to each member of staff and all seven students completed the qualification within 7 - 12 months of starting.

Andrea Weatheritt, Senior Receptionist, was one of the members of staff who took part and achieved her NVQ Level 3 in Business and Administration. She said: "Doing the NVQ was a great way to develop our skills and it made everyone on the course realise just how much their job involves. The course is assessed by having colleagues witness the work you were doing and this encouraged positive feedback and appreciation of the work that we are doing."

Other learning and development is also taking place within Ashington High School using five on-site training days a year as well as investing in attendance at externally provided training events. The LSC has also provided funding for professional support staff to undertake Leadership and Management development training, while the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) is funding a Certificate in Business Management for a member of staff. Teaching and professional support staff are also completing distance and work-based learning up to degree/MA/PHD level.

Since the additional qualifications have been available at Ashington High School, more staff have taken up the NVQ process and learning is set to continue with some of the original learners wanting to carry on and study for NVQ Level 4.

Benefits

Benefits for the staff and the school include:

- Staff now have a qualification that reflects the work they do
- Increased motivation and morale
- Staff have access to learning that they may not have had time/funding for in the past
- Added value to the school's workforce

"It was a great opportunity for our staff to get a formal qualification that reflected the work they were already doing. The style of the delivery of support from Star Consultancy has meant that they have been able to work flexibly towards a qualification of national recognition and this has been a great success. Many of our staff would not have found the time to attend college outside of work hours, so bringing this into school has made the qualifications a lot more accessible."

Zephanie Thompson
Business Manager, Ashington High School





Bonne Bouche is a frozen dessert manufacturer based in Peterlee. Established 19 years ago, the factory now employs approximately 240 full-time staff. Employees range from production line workers in assembly and packing, to product and technical development workers. Work is carried out over two shifts and the factory is open from 6am-10pm.



The Northumberland, Tyne & Wear Strategic Health Authority (SHA) was launched in April 2002 and operates in the North East of England. Newcastle College's Corporate Development arm has been in existence for three years and its mission is to work with large public and private sector organisations to introduce cost-effective training.

Bonne Bouche (Hartlepool) and Middlesbrough College

Case Background

The training function was established in the factory five years ago and there is now a strong culture for improving the skills of the workforce. The company has been through several changes recently and the training has helped keep the workforce focused and motivated.

The Innovation

The introduction of flexible training on site to fit around factory shift patterns and production schedules.

The Project

Middlesbrough College has been working closely with Bonne Bouche providing courses on site for five years. The first six months of the year is the company's quietest time and the employees are only needed to work for four days of the week. This gives the company one day a week to utilise for training and means staff do not lose any wages. In the second six months of the year, the company is in the run up to Christmas and production is running at maximum output so training is put on hold. Courses are run with Middlesbrough College to ensure that the training can be completed in the first six months of the year. Courses that have been delivered include:-

NVQ Level 1 and 2 in Food and Drink, Level 2 in Warehouse Distribution, Basic and Intermediate Food Hygiene, Health and Safety, Customer Service, Equality and Diversity and Business Administration.

Training is all done on site in the company's training room. Since allocating a room specifically for training, staff have not had to go off the premises to train which has enabled many more courses to be delivered and more staff have been able to attend.

Recently, a new initiative has been set up for Skills for Life. Some of the staff at Bonne Bouche have limited basic skills and there is a focus to rectify this. The emphasis is to ensure people get over their learning barriers and motivate themselves to push harder so they can progress within the company. To make the Skills for Life tests easier to deliver, sixteen laptops have been provided to ensure that people are able to improve their skills both at home or in the workplace.

Lynn Taylor from Middlesbrough College said: "We work very hard with Bonne Bouche to enable all the staff here to learn anything from basic skills up to NVQ Level 2. Having one day a week set aside for training gives us great scope for teaching people new skills."

Benefits

Since training has begun the company has seen the following benefits:

- Better understanding of health and safety issues
- Contamination incidents have decreased
- Accidents have reduced dramatically
- Staff feel more valued

"Since we have been training our staff they feel a lot more motivated and feel more secure in their jobs as we are investing in them personally. A lot of bad practices have been removed and people are much more eager to ensure that the factory runs at its most efficient."

Lynne Collins
Bonne Bouche

Northumberland, Tyne & Wear SHA and Newcastle College

Case Background

The National Health Service (NHS) is one of the biggest employers in the UK and demands a very wide range of skills with its workforce. It is an ever changing environment and more recently, many of the jobs emerging are at the lower end of the pay spectrum. It was predicted that, without change, by 2010, 80% of the current workforce will have either left the NHS or be doing a different job within the NHS.

The Innovation

The creation of courses specifically for administrators tailored to meet the ever-changing requirements of the NHS.

The Project

The Northumberland, Tyne & Wear SHA has been working very closely with Gaye Hutchinson, Director of Corporate Development Division at Newcastle College to come up with several programmes to increase the skills for the different types of people working in the NHS.

One big initiative was to introduce the Foundation Degree in Business Administration. Gaye said: "We noticed that there were few progression paths for people involved in administration within the organisation. Often people go on to do a management degree or a medical secretary course however this does not always suit everyone."

Working closely with the NHS, a Foundation Degree in Business Administration was developed specifically for administration staff. The course is the first of its kind in the country as it focuses specifically on the NHS processes that are only evident in this particular organisation.

The course was accredited last summer and was piloted last September with 15 people. Since the course began, word of mouth has increased the demand for places and, due to overwhelming uptake, the second intake of the course started just six months after in February 2006. Newcastle College now has plans to start the course through distance learning and open it up to the rest of the country. Vanessa Callaghan, a first year student on the course, said: "After completing an NVQ Level 3 it was a natural progression to the Foundation Degree. Through the programme I have

studied the Trust in much more depth and as a result I have worked on projects I wouldn't normally have been involved with."

In addition to the Foundation Degree, with the help of the Northumberland Care Trust, Newcastle College developed a bespoke course in record keeping to help home carers keep correct records. Currently, there is no legislation in place for home carers to keep records and there is a lot of responsibility on these people to provide the correct medication to their patients. The record keeping course written by Newcastle College focuses on people keeping the correct records that can be passed between home carers to ensure their patients are being administered the correct medication.

The NHS is working with schools to raise the aspirations of young people about the careers available within the NHS. They are currently running a very rigorous work experience programme that shows young people a wide range of different jobs within the organisation. Hazel Robson of the Northumberland, Tyne & Wear SHA believes that this programme is very different to standard work experience programme as people come out with a new outlook on the NHS and with strong aspirations to work within it.

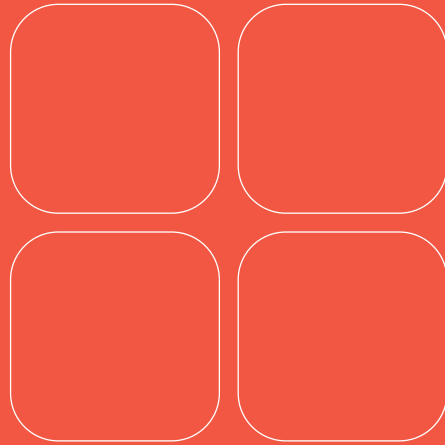
Additionally, NHS staff are working with schools and colleges by teaching in classes. With the knowledge of real life situations, NHS staff are able to bring lessons to life and give the young people a different perspective on the sector

Benefits

- Improved skills and accuracy amongst employees
- Employees are working on a course relevant to the job
- Increased satisfaction and motivation of employees
- Community benefits from increased knowledge of the NHS

"The courses at Newcastle College are just one of the many initiatives the NHS is implementing to train and educate its staff. We are working with people internally, in schools and the local community to ensure a continuous workforce is channelled into the NHS."

Hazel Robson
Northumberland, Tyne & Wear SHA



Derwentside Training, part of Derwentside District Council, has been working closely with the five local authorities in County Durham who have formed an innovative network called the Local Authority Partnership (LAP). The councils involved, Derwentside, Teesdale, Wear Valley and Chester-le-Street District Councils and Sedgefield Borough Council, have collaborated with the central aims of sharing skills and good practice with each other and increasing the overall skills of their workforces. Derwentside Training has been supporting the LAP, helping the partnership achieve its aims.

County Durham Local Authority Partnership and Derwentside Training

Case Background

Since the demise of the steel industry in County Durham, certain parts of the county are suffering from a legacy of high unemployment and huge skills gaps. The problems are exacerbated by the rural nature of much of the area. It was recognised that to ensure the future prosperity of the county there was a need for increased employment opportunities combined with retraining to allow local people to compete for the jobs.

An initial learning pilot took place in July 2004. Twenty local authority workers and ten people from local companies trained for qualifications in literacy and numeracy. The learning was all work-based and allowed people to undertake the qualifications with full support from their employers.

Following on from the pilot's success, Jill Scott from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Paul Kelly from Derwentside Training approached the LAP and were given the opportunity to continue the training with Local Authority workers. Additional support and funding was secured from the regional Employer Training Pilot (ETP) funded by the LSC.

The Innovation

A collaboration between five Local Authorities with the aim of improving employees' skills levels through the introduction of flexible work-based basic skills training.

The Project

Derwentside Training recruited 110 learners from the Local Authorities. Training courses were designed to run during work hours and development officers worked around shift patterns so that learners were able to attend the training sessions. Whilst sometimes unexpected increases in workload meant that training couldn't happen, the ETP funding meant that Councils were able to give their workers time in the classroom without affecting their service level agreements.

Following initial assessments the learner took part in a computer based diagnostic programme which tailored the programme of work to the individual's own level. This ensured training was appropriate for the learner and not too easy or too complicated.

To facilitate the end test two mobile test stations were introduced to ensure that learners could take tests within the workplace. The test stations consist of ten laptops that can be linked together on a local network. The laptops have a central server where test results can be processed and learners could find out straight away how they had done making it an ideal solution for both learner and trainer.

The style of training and the delivery mechanisms ensured the success rate was high - 104 of the 110 learners achieved literacy and numeracy qualifications.

At Derwentside Council depot, Colin Brothers, Electrician and Amicus union representative, was one of the first to go through the numeracy training and came out feeling much more confident. Colin said "The courses have really increased my knowledge and my confidence is growing. The trainers have been really flexible with their help and support and the Council has been great in giving us time off to study."

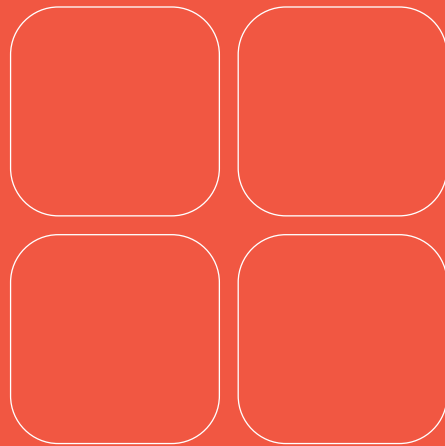
Benefits

The training by Derwentside Training has led to:-
Improved staff motivation
Increased confidence in individual ability
Increased skills and accuracy in daily work



The LAP has had great success with the literacy and numeracy qualifications. The LSC is now eager to engage other organisations to take part in the work based learning and Derwentside Training has recently recruited a tele-marketing company to increase the demand for the courses.

"It's one of the best things that the Council has done and I would recommend everyone should take part in the training. The Council has been great allowing us time off work to complete the training and it has made me feel much more confident. I no longer feel frightened of sums and have a good go at anything now."
Tommy Pratt
Yard Maintenance Officer



Acklington Prison in Northumberland is a category C prison and houses approximately 900 male inmates. It is situated alongside Castington Prison, a Young Offender Institution. There are approximately 30 full time teaching staff who work in Acklington Prison.

Acklington Prison (Northumberland) and Newcastle College

Case Background

Acklington Prison houses people from all walks of life but the inmates often have very basic literacy and numeracy skills. Like all prisons, Acklington is heavily involved in training and support. The over-riding aim is to educate inmates, reducing re-offending levels and helping them to stay away from crime once they are released. The training programme has enabled inmates, staff and volunteers to be trained to provide practical support to inmates in developing literacy and numeracy skills. Acklington is leading the way in inmate reformation and social training, introducing innovative learning activities and courses designed to buck the national trend in re-offending.

The Innovation

The approach that has been taken has seen the formation of a unique partnership between officers and inmates at the prison. A training programme was introduced run by Northumberland College and supported by the Learning and Skills Council Northumberland. Staff and inmates have been trained in Adult Learner Support to enable them to give immediate help to inmates and to identify those in need of support. A sizeable number of staff and inmates have also been trained to become assessors and verifiers.

In parallel with this initiative, the prison is also tailoring inmates' education to ensure offenders maximise their opportunities for employment on release. Identifying key issues and tackling them and identifying industry sectors with good opportunities, for example construction.

The Project

The partnership project involved wing officers, non-uniformed staff, volunteers and inmates at the prison working towards qualifications as classroom mentors. Training delivered by Northumberland College was designed to allow the group to assist the prison's teaching staff in providing practical support to inmates developing reading, writing and numeracy skills.

The group undertook 60 hours of tuition to achieve a Level 2 qualification in Adult Learner Support. The course covered a range of basic modules in literacy and numeracy linked to the adult core curriculum.

David Biddle, who headed up the project at the prison explained: "The idea was to help inmates enhance their skills and gain new qualifications so that when they leave they are in a stronger position to apply for jobs and not re-offend.

"It's little things such as someone who always forgets their glasses and needs someone else to tell them the time or read a letter," adds David. "Things that you wouldn't necessarily pick up during a lesson, but that you would notice over a period of time and realise someone couldn't read or write."

The classroom assistants now sit in on lessons delivered by the prison's teaching staff to provide practical assistance to inmates studying for a wide range of NVQ qualifications.

Ray Malecki, learning broker at the LSC Northumberland, said: "Acklington has worked hard to develop a strong learning culture within the prison and that is something we're keen to support. The training that is being provided represents a real opportunity for personal development, with inmates able to gain new skills and qualifications.

"This model is quite rare and is believed to be one of the only situations of its kind that has occurred in the country where staff and inmates have participated in joint training programmes."

Some of the training has been taken a step further and this has led to a number of staff and inmates qualifying as assessors and verifiers. This has proved invaluable for inmates involved in vocational activities, allowing them to gain NVQs.

As well as this project, the prison has also looked at the range of learning opportunities available to inmates. Tony Pinkerton, Head of Learning and Skills at the prison, aims to introduce innovative approaches within education and ensure that skills learnt whilst in prison are transferable to life on the outside. Within the prison there are training courses covering a diverse range of subjects at a variety of levels - everything from basic skills, citizenship and industrial cleaning up to



BTEC Business studies and NVQ Catering Level 2. Traditional work in the prison still takes place. Whilst these jobs provide a purpose, Tony is moving education forward by looking at the problems faced on leaving prison and tailoring the learning accordingly. The prison is starting to offer new courses such as construction where there are many opportunities for work.

Benefits

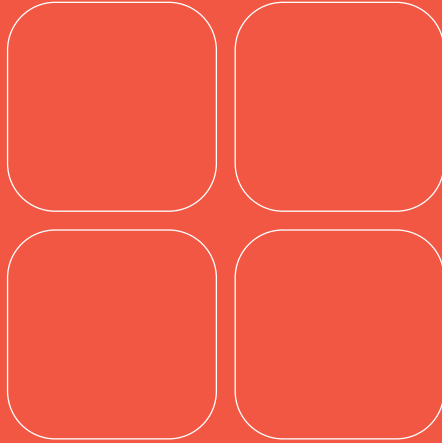
Acklington Prison is looking at learning in a new way. As well as training teams of classroom mentors to tackle skills for life needs, they are making sure that the courses and training offered are relevant for the outside world. Everything is designed to improve inmates' chances on release and to reduce the tendency to return to crime because of poor prospects. The benefits that have arisen from this new approach are:

- Team of classroom assistants supporting education team
- Dissemination of skills in identifying basic skills needs
- More support for inmates with basic skills needs

- Personal development for staff, volunteers and inmates involved in the learner support training
- Trained verifiers and assessors
- More opportunity for inmates to gain accredited qualifications
- Prisoners can learn a new trade and can be trained for specific job sectors
- Helping to reduce re-offending rates

"By training inmates, wing officers, volunteers and our non-uniformed staff as classroom mentors, we want them to take the lead in helping others. They are the ones who have the most contact with other inmates and, with the training they've received, can help to identify those who may have basic skills needs and sign post them to where they can receive support."

David Biddle
Acklington Prison



Nissan car manufacturing plant based in Sunderland has produced over four million cars since it opened in 1986 and has been the biggest car exporter in the UK for the last six years.

Nissan (Sunderland) and Gateshead College

Case Background

Nissan car plant is a rapidly growing manufacturer in the North East and has a high demand for skilled labour. Temporary workers employed came from various types of background and many had no experience of manufacturing or production line work.

A unique partnership between Gateshead College and Nissan involving the creation of a mini production line off site and the development of tailored training has meant that Nissan is able to train people away from the demands of a "live" production environment.

The Innovation

The creation of a replica production line at Gateshead College to train Nissan staff.

The Project

Nissan approached Gateshead College to devise a new approach to recruitment. Mick Brophy from Gateshead College took a team to the company and spent time researching the working practices and talking to staff. The research gave them key information about why people left the company. Some reasons, such as lack of experience, they were already aware of but new reasons also emerged for example people simply weren't fit enough for the job.

After spending the time researching the working environment and working with physiotherapists to find out common causes of pain and health issues, Mick and his team designed an NVQ Level 2 course that lasted nine months and that taught people all the skills needed to work on the production line. This included building up the physical strength and stamina needed to carry out the job on a day to day basis.

The main part of the training is carried out at the college's Automotive and Manufacturing Centre of Excellence on Team Valley where a carbon copy of a Nissan assembly line has been replicated. Here the students are able to work on the production lines just as they would at Nissan. Everything is an exact copy, from the uniforms to quality checks on the walls to ensure that they know exactly how Nissan operates. Nissan has also provided a Line Supervisor to train the students to ensure that they are working to Nissan's exacting standards.

The course works on monthly cycles where the students carry out three weeks in the training environment and one week at Nissan working on the actual lines. Each month a new skill is taught, ensuring trainees walk away with a full set of skills at the end of the course. By the time they complete the training, students have had seven weeks work experience in the factory. Additionally there are a lot of skills built up that aren't assessed specifically in the NVQ but are very beneficial such as speed, dexterity and improved quality.

At the end of the course, students are set a challenge to come up with a new idea to improve the training facilities for next year's students.

Last year, students noticed that there was more overhead work done in the factory than in the training area. As a result, overhead rigs were designed, built and installed in the training area to ensure the following year's students got the overhead work experience that they needed.

Mick Brophy of Gateshead College said: "The course is designed so that the employer gets a ready-made employee with all the skills, knowledge and aptitude to perform on the production line. Each student gets a performance review every week which is given to Nissan so they know at what stage they are at. We train the students in Nissan's core ethos - your colleague down the line is your customer, so don't pass poor quality downstream."

Benefits

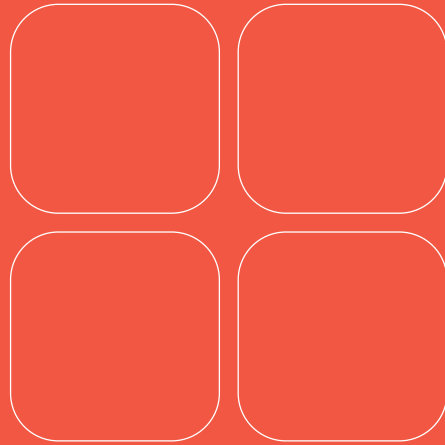
It is intended that the training by Gateshead College will:

- Increase productivity
- Decrease staff turnover
- Improve quality levels
- Increase fitness of staff

"People that come off the training course are as good as the people that have been at Nissan for ten years. Every process is taught and then speeded up over the course - one process has been reduced from seven minutes to 26 seconds."

Steve Greener
Nissan





The Walkers factory is based in Peterlee in County Durham and produces the famous Walkers crisps and snacks. Employing over 600 people in a range of jobs from general operatives to management, the factory has a high profile in the area.

Walkers Factory (Peterlee)

Case Background

Employment in Peterlee was traditionally in coal-mining or heavy industry. The closure of the pits in the 1980s and 90s had a massive impact on the local community with one third of all local jobs being lost. This led to serious social and economic problems and a continuing legacy of a shortage of skills in the area.

Many of the local people working in the Walkers factory are employed in unskilled or low-skilled jobs. Management recognised that the improvement of the skills base of the employees would be beneficial for the workforce and for the business. They therefore initiated a training plan designed to increase the skills of the workforce. Initially on a small scale, the training scheme has rapidly expanded and now over 70% of the staff have taken advantage of the training offered. The model is being adopted by Walkers plants throughout the UK and is seen as an overwhelming success.

The Innovation

The introduction of a staff training centre that is also a resource for the entire community.

The Project

The training centre, which was funded by One NorthEast through County Durham Economic Partnership, European funding and Walkers, opened in August 2003. Demand for the service was extremely high and, with funding from the local council, a full time manager was appointed.

The demand for training has continued to rise and the centre has had to expand accordingly. Now a learndirect centre it boasts three training rooms and an I.T. suite complete with up to date technology and video conferencing facilities.

The training centre gives Walkers staff access to over 500 courses and is also an accredited test centre for numeracy and literacy, CLAIT and NVQs. The majority of workers have used the centre to help them improve their numeracy and literacy.

With over 70% of the workforce using the training centre, it has proved to be a phenomenal success and a benefit to both individuals and the company.

As well as the success of the centre within the factory, the facility had also been set up as a community learning resource. The doors were opened to the whole community to utilise and benefit from the training facilities. Anyone living in the local area is able to use the centre and study any of the courses on offer to employees. This is having a big impact on the skills levels of the community.

Carl who works as a General Operative in the factory is currently doing an European Computer Driving License (ECDL), a qualification in computer skills. Carl, who fits his learning in around his shifts, said: "I'm enjoying the course which is really flexible. It's helping me expand my knowledge in spreadsheets, databases and word processing. There is a really wide choice of courses to do here and it's great to be able to learn different things."

Continued funding for the centre has been generated through Walkers, learndirect and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and it hopes to secure more funding in the future. The centre is currently open for nine hours a day but plans for the future centre around opening 24/7. This would mirror the factory opening hours, allowing employees access to the centre no matter what shift they are on.

The success of Peterlee has paved the way for Walkers factories around the UK to open learning centres based upon this model.



Benefits

The centre has proved beneficial to individual employees, the company and the wider community. Benefits and improvements that have been identified include:

- 25% of staff have gained a formal qualification
- 70% of the workforce are currently studying for a qualification
- People have become more challenging at work, asking questions about improving processes and bringing their new knowledge to bear on their jobs
- Less wastage
- Increased efficiency
- Improved computer skills have led to quicker completion time for jobs
- Learners are able to study both at home or in the workplace
- The creation of a model that is being replicated by other factories

"Opening the centre has enabled us to identify where the skills gaps lie. This has allowed us to improve skills levels not only in the factory but also in the local community. We do a lot of work-based training, particularly with IT programmes such as Excel. We have also seen a basic skills issue emerge and we work hard to improve people's literacy and numeracy."
Geoff Spuhler
 Walkers



Several organisations in Northumberland have been working together to increase the awareness and knowledge of renewable energy sources in the North East. These are the Northumberland College, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Northern Energy Initiative (TNEI), the New and Renewable Energy Centre (NAREC), Business Link, the Northumberland Renewable Energy Group (NREG), Northumberland Strategic Partnership and Haddon Associates.



FM Foods, based in Sunderland, is a food manufacturer and supplier that employs 35 local staff and two directors based in London.

Their core business involves the import of fair trade products such as dried fruit, vegetables and nuts and they work closely with suppliers in three main countries, Burkina Faso, Uganda and Pakistan.

FM Foods is open from 6am – 8pm running a variety of shifts throughout these hours to ensure production lines are kept running.

Northumberland Renewable Energy Group and Northumberland College

Case Background

Currently, there are few people in the UK who are qualified in the renewable energy field and the majority of the workforce has to be drafted in from overseas. With £42m earmarked for development of renewable energy in Northumberland alone, the skills gap is set to get wider. To help combat this, courses have been designed for people who currently work in engineering, construction or land based industries that would like to become involved in working with wind turbines, biomass heating plants and other aspects of renewable energy. These courses aim to ensure that there is a growth in the skills levels in the field of renewable energy in the UK.

Several projects are also underway to inform councils, schools and businesses on the benefits of renewable energy with the aim of increasing the awareness and popularity of alternative methods of energy generation.

The Innovation

The creation of two courses for engineers designed to take advantage of developments in renewable energy and to lead to an increase in the UK skills base in this area. Alongside this, some partners have also been working with schools that will help ensure a demand for such courses in the future.

The Project

Northumberland College have developed two courses, one in Biomass (wood fuel technology) and one in wind turbine energy. The courses lead to NVQ qualifications Level 2 and 3. A Foundation Degree in renewable energy is also in the early stages of development with a partner college in Germany.

The demand for renewable energy is rising and the courses, the first of their kind in the country, aim to qualify people to promote, install and maintain renewable energy sources. The course in wind energy covers the construction and installation of wind turbines, electrical installation and ongoing maintenance. The course in biomass covers the mechanics of the biomass boilers, the production of the correct fuel, health and safety and training on machinery needed for biomass production.

The training consists of both classroom and hands on experience with visits to power stations such as Drax in North Yorkshire (a part biomass power station), visits to willow farmers (one of the fuel source for biomass boilers), visits to wind farms (established and prospective) and lectures from energy companies.

21 people have now completed the pilot course on wind energy and 20 have gone through the course in Biomass, both of which can be done full time or on a day release basis.

NREG is funded by One NorthEast through the Northumberland Strategic Partnership and one of its main aims is to raise the profile of renewable energy in schools and businesses. NREG has commissioned Haddon Associates to develop an initiative called the Renewable Energy Aspire Programme (REAP). REAP is currently aiming to raise the aspirations of young people in schools to create awareness for the career opportunities with the renewable sector.

Phase one of this project involved going into local schools and colleges to find out what the community wanted. Feedback established a desire to know more about renewable energy and this led to creating a course for young people in years 3 and 4. A pilot is planned in two schools and is a mix of classroom and field based learning.

Benefits

- Huge demand for services as CO₂ emissions are reduced
- Local economy is improved
- Local skills base is increased
- Growing demand in the UK and abroad for the courses
- Generating interest in renewables as a career option

"There is a lot of interest in the course and, with the increase in local businesses and uptake of renewable energy in Northumberland, there will be good job prospects in the future."

Ian Fisher
Northumberland College

FM Foods (Sunderland), Newcastle College and Anderson Business College

Case Background

The company is rapidly expanding their core function and believes that training their staff and ensuring they are happy in their work will lead to high retention of employees and improved skills. The mindset amongst management is that the key to growth is having happy, productive and loyal staff. FM Foods was awarded Investors in People status three years ago and has continued to invest in staff development.

The Innovation

The introduction of work-based learning across a range of courses at a range of levels.

The Project

The nature of the industry that FM Foods operates within means that training is vital - all employees undergo internal procedural training, directly linked to BRC (British Retail Consortium) requirements. In addition to this, some staff have been involved in NVQ programmes in Team Leadership and Food and Drink Manufacturing.

The NVQs have been run on site in partnership with Newcastle College and Anderson Business College and have meant that staff have been able to increase their skills whilst at work. The employer ensures that all learning is carried out within work time and that people get the support they need to complete their qualifications.

Elizabeth Thompson completed her NVQ Level 3 with Anderson Business College and said: "Completing the training has made me feel much more confident. I didn't think I would be able to complete it but with the strong support of everyone at FM Foods and the college I was able to learn new skills that help me carry out my job effectively."

Margaret Cook and Ranjo Sheikh are currently taking NVQ Level 2 in Team Leading with Newcastle College. Ranjo said: "The support from our NVQ advisor at Newcastle College has been excellent. He uses work based examples to

bring theory to life." Both Margaret and Ranjo are pleased that they have been given a chance to improve their qualifications, something they wouldn't have had time to do outside of work.

Karen Hetherington, Project Manager at FM Foods ensures that training is an ongoing process and with the support of organisations such as Business Link and the North East Food and Drink Network (NEFDN) they have been able to get funding to give their staff access to a range of courses. Karen said: "The support that is out there for small business is fantastic - Business Link has funded courses as diverse as Auditing, Accounting and Fork Lift Training. The NEFDN has run a professional training course which trains our staff to train others in the factory."

Benefits

- FM Foods has seen several benefits since beginning the training including:
- Increased efficiency
 - Increased employee confidence
 - Increased motivation and morale
 - Increased knowledge and skills base within company

"The benefits we have seen in the factory have been increased motivation and confidence in the job they are doing. The training makes the staff feel more valued and it is great to see them develop in their roles."

Karen Hetherington
FM Foods