

National Employer Service Effective Practice: Developing Your Workforce

5. Internal Assessment

The NES Effective Practice Series:

This guide is one of a series commissioned by the Quality Improvement Agency and developed by York Consulting LLP. The series is based on interviews with senior management, assessors, instructors and employees on training programmes in large, nationally recognised companies that receive Government funding for training through the LSC's National Employer Service (NES).

This series recognises the benefits to these companies of undertaking structured training programmes leading to externally recognised qualifications, and presents effective practice examples identified through delivering key programme elements.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and contributors and do not necessarily represent QIA's views.

Background

One area that may put some employers off from providing nationally recognised qualifications is the assessment process.

Some of the national employers receiving funding from the NES were not keen for an individual, external to the company, judging the quality of their employees without understanding their business environment. Some had a bad experience of external assessment in the past.

These companies have therefore taken assessment in-house. This is both challenging and places demands on resources. This guide presents the benefits of internal assessment perceived by individual companies that are felt to outweigh the costs. It also looks at different ways of delivering an internal assessment process.

Employers Featured in this Guide

Doosan Babcock

Doosan Babcock is a multi-national engineering and technology company that operates in industries including thermal and nuclear power generation.

An Ofsted inspection of their NVQ programmes in September 2007 assessed provision as Good (Grade 2) in five out of six inspection areas.

Robert Wiseman Dairies

Robert Wiseman Dairies are one of the leading suppliers and processors of dairy products in the United Kingdom.

Their completion and success rates on their programmes that receive some Government funding have shown significant improvement in recent years.

BMW

BMW is one of the world's premier prestige automobile and motorcycle manufacturers.

In 2003 their apprenticeship programme was awarded a National Contracts Service (NCS) quality Achievement Award. In 2004 the company achieved Beacon status from the former DfES and in 2005 won a National Training Award. They achieved an Ofsted Grade 1 at inspection in February 2008.

Barchester

Barchester cares for more than 10,000 residents in over 180 homes in the UK.

Barchester are currently preparing their latest Ofsted inspection, but have excellent success and completion rates.

Kwik Fit

Kwik Fit are experts in automotive repairs including tyres, exhausts and brakes. They serve around 7.5 million customers a year out of 570 centres nationwide. NVQ success rates are at almost 100%.

Tesco

Tesco is the largest retailer operating in the United Kingdom and the third largest in the world.

At a recent Ofsted inspection their Apprenticeship programme and Train to Gain service were judged to be Good (Grade 2) in all six inspection areas.

Robert Wiseman Dairies: An In-House Ethos

As with other parts of their business, Robert Wiseman Dairies likes to keep as much as possible of their training in-house. For assessors of the driver training programme this goes a step further, with the role not only being held in-house but the majority of the six part-time and two full-time assessors being recruited from Robert Wiseman Dairies own drivers – several of whom came through the programme themselves. This has brought benefits to both the company and to learners.

Having previous trainees go on to become assessors shows people that the company is willing to support them and that there are opportunities for employees if they are willing to put in the required effort.

Internal assessors also fully understand what is required for the job and can also spend more time supporting each trainee and work with them through their problems as well as deciding when they are ready for assessment. This has benefits to the individual in terms of the support they receive, as well as for the company in ensuring both the quality of the programme and that assessment is of what is required for the job.

Robert Wiseman Dairies feel that their internal assessors also have the flexibility to visit and assess trainees at any time of the day and in any part of the country.

"We are an old fashioned company that likes to do things ourselves."

Human

Looking at the assessment process itself, Robert Wiseman Dairies believe that in-house assessment provides substantial benefits over external assessment, including:

- flexibility;
- control over quality;
- a focus on training the company really needs.

Robert Wiseman Dairies acknowledge that for some areas of the business the scale of training delivery means that external training and assessment may always be necessary, and they are looking at a trial use of a sub-contractor for certain elements of their overall training programme. However, they believe that having substantial in-house experience of delivering training and assessment will mean that they will be able to manage delivery by external contractors far more intelligently.

"The people (trained as assessors) know the business, whilst we have overall control over what is being taught."

HR Director

BMW: A Leap of Faith

The decision for BMW to run an in-house NVQ programme was a big leap of faith on the part of the company, especially the decision to have work place mentors and assessors – previously the on-job assessment had been done by colleges. However, there was a clear business rationale for doing this:

- Company culture – While the colleges “were good at delivering the qualifications required” they could do little in the way of training apprentices about the BMW brand and company culture. An in-house programme means BMW can embed the company culture from day one. For example, BMW, as a company, has a strict dress code with all apprentices required to wear a shirt and tie while training at the Academy.
- Technology – The technology in a BMW car changes year on year and colleges and BMW were struggling to keep up with this pace of technology change at six different sites. Also, the bespoke knowledge required by the college trainers was hard to maintain – “it was hard to get college trainers into BMW to get them up to speed with new BMW processes and protocols”.
- Feedback from dealerships – There was a sense that the NVQs being delivered by colleges were not always meeting the needs of dealerships – “Joe Blogs has done an NVQ, but he doesn’t properly understand the BMW product”.

Tesco: Flexible Assessment

Assessment is of the apprentice doing real jobs in their store. As retail is often a reactive business, planning this assessment can be problematic.

For example, assessing customer services skills can be difficult if there are no customers arriving at the desk at the hour set aside for assessment. Equally, freeing up staff for both assessment and training can be difficult for managers who just want to get stock shifted.

This is where the strength of the system comes in assessors also work in the store, and as the Apprentices' direct Line Managers, they are able to work shoulder to shoulder to deliver training and assessment on-the-job.

Assessors are therefore able to act to balance the needs of the individual apprentice against store pressures and ultimately the company.

"TAP has been great for us and has made a big difference to our trainers. They now have the confidence to change the delivery of a unit and to try different things out which might work better. If they find an improvement, they then share it with everyone."

Head of Training

Kwik Fit: Assessing the Trainers

Over the past 18 months Kwik Fit has introduced training for its own trainers and assessors.

The Trainer Assessment Programme (TAP) has been very well received by the trainers that they have in post, some of whom may never have had trainer training but may have been in post for a considerable time.

The internal Quality Manager is a qualified training assessor, which means that they are able to better assess the quality of training provision and provide feedback to trainers. They monitor the length of time trainers spend on different activities (i.e. time spent demonstrating vs. time for learners to practice skills) and can tell trainers if the training is incorrectly balanced.

Each trainer receives a DVD containing two lessons they gave during the TAP course: one at the outset and one at the end. The DVD serves as a reminder to the trainers and stops them falling back into their old methods of teaching.

Doosan Babcock: The Importance of Control

In establishing the apprenticeship programmes, Doosan Babcock made a conscious effort to keep the assessment and verification process in house as far as is possible. This is by no means straightforward – finding assessors to meet the demands of a transient workforce is not easy. To compound this difficulty, individual qualified craftsman within Doosan Babcock and the industries in which they operate can earn much higher pay rates ‘on the tools’ compared to those offered to assessors.

Doosan Babcock believe that the difficulties in recruiting internal assessors are outweighed by the benefits of internal assessment – with the biggest benefits being the control the company has over a process greatly complicated by the mobile workforce.

Some Doosan Babcock employees have received training to become assessors, but the company has also needed to recruit qualified assessors into the company to meet demand. Whilst this was primarily due to difficulties in finding individuals within the company to take up the post, the company have found the influx of new ideas from outside the company a real benefit.

*“Bringing in people from the outside with a different skill set has allowed us to approach assessment differently”
Apprentice Manager*

Barchester: Ensuring Quality

Due to the highly competitive market for qualified staff in the care sector, investment in externally recognised qualifications is a business risk for operators in the sector. For Barchester, the benefits in terms of quality of care for qualified staff outweigh the business risks.

Given the shifting legislative sands associated with care services and the importance of ensuring staff are trained and compliant, the perceived and measured quality of care in a home is dependent on staff being prepared and able to pick up new skills.

In Barchester homes, NVQ coordinators are staff working in their Academy. Their role is to support the assessors and maintain quality standards. Assessors are chosen from suitably qualified colleagues and senior staff within the care home of each employee on the programme. There are a number of benefits to this model in comparison to the peripatetic model, where assessors are outside the home:

- it enhances the quality of care;
- it engenders a learning culture;
- the ownership of NVQs remains at the home level.