

## **NVQs are only for large companies!**

That's a phrase which seems to be heard far too often. Perhaps it's time to challenge it. After all NVQs are about proving that you can do your job competently. They are not about developing large lever arch files full of paper, as so many people think. They are about having evidence to show someone that you are competent.

Charles Hughes, who recently put himself and two of his management colleagues through the Health, Safety and Environmental Management NVQs – one at each level, says

“collating the evidence is all about looking at your remit and quizzing yourself about what you do and, more importantly, why you do it”.

Hugh King & Co is a small family business with 25 employees that has been providing industrial and building sands in and around Ayrshire for approximately 150 years.

During a routine visit in 2004 to inspect their quarrying operation the HSE's desire for an industry standard in Safety, Health and Environment regulations was discussed. Initially there was a feeling of ambivalence towards the initiative. Individuals had qualifications and a proven track record within the industry. However they felt it is right to try to standardise methods and procedures to ensure that a common language is being spoken and understood.

There is enough guidance within the framework of Health & Safety Law to ensure that all aspects of business operate in a responsible way. However it is the individuals' interpretation of these rules and codes of practice that can lead to shortfalls in the management of site safety. They therefore took the decision to embrace the NVQ route to achieve qualifications in Health Safety and Environmental Management in the Extractive and Minerals Processing Industry.

What did this mean to the candidates? This is what they said about it:

“It was not a daunting task. The answers to the majority of the questions are staring you in the face and it is a case of looking at each problem from a slightly different perspective. The answers can be as easy or as complicated as you wish to make them ..... answers are built around the business' interpretation of common safe practices and the various laws governing the industry as a whole. Having a registered quality management system in place provides a base from which a large number of answers are extracted, especially from internally audited procedures and work instructions.”

In June 2007 they all successfully obtained their NVQs and feel that they are now confident they are managing the business in a safe and environmentally positive manner with staff who are well trained and suitably motivated

Part of the reason they reached these conclusions was, without a doubt, because the assessor they worked with took an approach to the NVQ which was not about masses of paperwork but about helping them to identify what evidence they needed to show him to prove their competence. This process is the same in any NVQ at any level, where competence should be proved by observation, questioning and witness testimonies – not by asking the candidate to do a lot of writing or, worse still, photocopying! There is a real step change going on in the NVQ world which can only be for the better. In our industry these qualifications are key to making a safer and more competent work force which meets the QNJAC requirements.

Those people who rejected the idea of NVQs not being for them either because of cost or difficulty might want to re-consider – things are very different now and EMP is running a series of workshops around the UK next June for the smaller companies who would like to explore these opportunities a little further. If you would like a free place at one of these please email us at [info@empawards.com](mailto:info@empawards.com) with your contact details.

To finish I'd like to congratulate Charles and his colleagues for taking up the challenge, successfully gaining the qualifications and confirming that smaller companies can demonstrate new industry practices.

Carol Pillinger

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