



Left to right: Danny Gale (MD) with apprentice Will Roberts and his mentor Rhys Gale

Gas Care Wales Limited: how Gas Care Wales is working through the recession using National Occupational Standards

Background

Gas Care Wales Limited is a heating and electrical company. Founded in 1984, the company employs 22 people, with 65 per cent of staff undertaking specialist electrical work. Employees install gas fires, surrounds, central heating (oil, gas and electric), as well as heat pumps. They also install solar panels and offer a re-wiring service for domestic and light commercial use. The company covers south Wales, as well as Bristol, Gloucester and Cheltenham. The show room, which is based at their headquarters in Cardiff, displays gas and electric fires, fireplaces and solar panels.

The company's professionalism has resulted in considerable word of mouth recommendations which, combined with newspaper advertising and slots on local radio, have brought in most of its clients from approximately 800,000 houses. Danny Gale, Managing Director, has been at the company since it was founded.

Adapting to a recessionary market

The company have been using National Occupational Standards (NOS) for a year and have brought in a Contract Manager to oversee their progression. To date, 85 per cent of the staff have had their qualifications and job descriptions reviewed in relation to NOS.

With the recession threatening his business, Danny Gale has been keen to ensure that his staff were able to present the most relevant and recognisable skills. He said:

"We probably have one of the highest qualified workforces in our field in this area of Wales but that is not enough in a recession. We are continually developing the skill base of our staff whether they work behind the scenes in admin or are trained electricians. The major issue with a company like us, however, is that the skillsets are changing all the time. Photo voltaic (PV) solar panels, for example, haven't been out long and there are large contracts to be had because of government grants, so we have to ensure that our employees are more skilful, and that they are familiar with the new regulations to take on the work.

"In business, you always have to be one step ahead: you have to win the work, and to do that you have to have recognisable qualifications and skills – and that's what you get with NOS."



"We also used to do a lot of work for builders like Bellway and Barratts but with the recession, prices went so low and the work dropped, so we had to re-examine how we ran the company to adapt to the changing markets."

Using NOS and introducing recognisable qualifications

Danny Gale wanted his trained heating and electrical engineers to be proficient in areas such as renewable so that they would become more skilful in all the new technologies coming through including solar photovoltaic (PV solar panels) and ground source heat pumps.

Grants provided by the Welsh Assembly Government and the ProAct Scheme provided part of the funding for the company to 'upskill' the staff. As Danny Gale said:

"For us to survive as a company we needed the funding to ensure that our staff's qualifications were fully in line with certain job descriptions because we were unable to tender for work unless our operators had the qualifications."

NOS are used by Gas Care Wales to ensure that all the qualifications attained by staff are in line with everyone else in the industry and are recognised externally. In addition to the company using NOS for on-going staff development, they will use NOS for recruitment.

As Danny Gale acknowledges, for a company the size of Gas Care Wales, taking on NOS, is a gradual process. Most importantly, however, he recognises the value of qualifications in the current business climate:

"It's worthwhile because the better the qualifications, the better the skillset, the more money we can make. Businesses and individuals are far more aware of the skills that are required and are asking a lot more for this type of information when we tender. Our company is as good as the staff who work in it so it is vital that their skillset is relevant and recognisable."

How staff respond to NOS

More attention to regular training and the introduction of NOS has led Danny Gale to believe that his staff have gained greater confidence:

"In business, you always have to be one step ahead: you have to win the work, and to do that you have to have recognisable qualifications and skills – and that's what you get with NOS. I can see NOS being used as a benchmark with employees taking their recognisable and transferable qualifications and skills to wherever they want to go in their careers."

Intelligence > Investment > Impact

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