



CASE STUDY

WALES & WEST UTILITIES LTD

Wales & West Utilities Ltd is a gas distribution network (GDN) that transports gas to homes and businesses across the whole of Wales and the South West of England. We look after 35,000 km of pipe in total and serve a population of over 7.5 million people. Customers are at the heart of our business; we are the recognised industry leader, when it comes to customer service, and have won numerous industry-related customer service awards.

Wales & West Utilities Ltd currently employs approximately 1480 Direct Employees and approximately an additional 580 Contractor Employees within the Western Gas Alliance across the entire network.

Our highly skilled engineers also deal with gas escapes; over 100,000 are reported every year, via the national gas emergency number: 0800 111 999. Given the very nature of the gas industry, the safety challenge for the business is significant and constantly under scrutiny but, in a few short years, we have built and developed a first class reputation within the utilities industry. Nurturing and maintaining that industry leading safety record requires top quality training, in a safe and controlled environment - and this was the major driving force behind our unrivalled £3m training facility at our Treforest depot. Our highly successful apprentice scheme - we have a 99% retention rate - has also benefitted from our investment in training facilities, not only at Treforest but across our network.

In 2002, a 30-year mains replacement programme began, to replace old metal pipes with new plastic ones that have a lifespan of over 80 years. To help us deliver this, within the Western gas Alliance we work with contractors AMEC and Morrison Utility Services (MUS). Since the partnership's launch there has been an equal interest by WWU, AMEC and MUS in building strong working relationships, sharing best practices and working towards the common goal of delivering the extensive programme of work on time and to budget. These large programmes continue at pace, with a number of projects in place for 2014.

Using National Occupational Standards (NOS):

NOS are used by all of Wales & West Utilities Ltd, Build and Replace Departmental Operatives (approx. 500) and all Western Gas Alliance Operatives. They are the basis of and incorporated in the City & Guilds 6028 Network Construction Operatives

Level 1 Certificate, Level 2 Diploma/ Certificate. The following National Occupational Standards MUNC – GNC 01 to 17 and EUS MUNC 24 to 27 are identified as the key NOS relating to these qualifications. They help ensure a recognised level of qualification and competence for Build & Replace and Western Gas Alliance Operatives, delivered and assessed against National Standards.

Testimony

Employer

“This allows employer’s to employ operatives secure in the knowledge they are competent and have been assessed to a nationally recognised standard, including minimum levels of training hours and numbers of written and practical assessments.”

Training Provider

“This new qualification offers operatives the opportunity to achieve a quality certificate and is a massive improvement on the old scheme. The scheme is much more user friendly and ensures a robust qualification is deliverable.”

Assessor

“Offers flexibility for operatives to obtain various units within the qualification structure which are applicable to their duties and offers potential for future personal development.”

Operative

“This new qualification is sets clear goals and outlines exactly what is required to complete the units.”

Benefits

Employer

Ensures Legal and HSE compliance is maintained/ established as all Operatives are trained and assessed to nationally recognised Standards and qualifications. Enables the Company to prove competency of its Operatives to work and operate on the Gas Distribution Network and comply with its Licence to Operate to deliver the safe operational responsibilities of the Network.”

Individual employee

Individual Operatives are able to achieve nationally recognised qualifications, provides the individual with a sector recognised registration scheme (EUSR) and once available the level 3, 4 & 5 qualifications will assist with career progression and personal betterment.

Impact

This NOS-based qualification and its availability has resulted in increased staff retention, enhanced staff commitment, increased career progression opportunities and delivered improvements to our customers service experience.

The future

To work with the Awarding Body (City & Guilds Institute of London) and the Utility Sector Skills Council (Energy Utility Skills) to produce Level 3, 4 & 5 Network Construction Operative (NCO) qualifications to raise our Employees to a higher level of qualification (up skilling) and for use with a proposed apprenticeship programme.

The Level 3 qualification is nearing completion and ready for publication complete with part of the level 4 qualification.

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