

# Training the Trainers:

## Jewel and Esk's Partnership with GL Floors



Ron McGilp is Learning Manager at Jewel and Esk College and is responsible for Hospitality, Hairdressing, Beauty and Complimentary Therapies and Health. He has been working in education for 19 years, having initially started out as hospitality lecturer. He is heavily involved with the work-based training and development awards, particularly relating to assessment and verification of standards.

**M**eeting the business needs of local employers is not always as simple as it may first appear. Yes, we need to ensure the skills we provide the labour market match those required for economic growth. However, this is not always as simple as ensuring the courses we offer tie in with local business needs. Sometimes, it is about working closely with employers to deliver a bespoke service, tailored to their needs.

We started working with Edinburgh company GL Floors in 2004. They are a privately owned SME, specialising in supplying and installing hardwood floors. Managing Partner, Martin Smith, was looking for a way of tying their existing staff training into a nationally recognised qualification. One of the company's unique selling points is the value they place on hiring and training their own skilled tradesmen, rather than following the trend to employ sub-contractors. This policy is at the core of the product they offer, with an emphasis on quality, traditional craftsmanship. They were keen to ensure this ethos was embedded in the company's values, and saw that including a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in their training and development would be a good way of doing so.

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GL Floors already offered a staff training package, and this served as a basis for the development of their SVQ. In order to offer this training in-house, the company had to gain approval as a Scottish Qualification Authority centre, certain staff members had to become qualified SQA accreditors, course material had to be devised, teaching methods devised and qualifications processes defined. This was where we came in. We worked closely with GL Floors to progress them to approved centre status with the SQA so that they could be recognised as a provider of SVQs in Construction – Floor Covering (timber route). The SQA granted GL Floors approval as an SVQ Centre in December 2004.

In conjunction with securing approved centre status for the company, we also worked with Martin Smith and his colleague, Stuart Ramsay, who both enrolled in two part-time modules to qualify formally as

SQA assessors. Once these were achieved, the two assessors sat the V1 verifiers' award, which they completed in March 2007. All these qualifications were gained by the two senior managers whilst continuing to run a successful business, which is testament to their vision for staff development and dedication to making it a reality.

After three years of dedication and hard work, working in close partnership with the staff here at the college, the first two members of staff have completed GL Floors' SVQ course. At the time of writing, the staff members are awaiting final SQA verification of their award. The course itself is based on workplace learning and assessment and takes up to two years to complete. It is delivered and assessed by Martin and Stuart and then externally verified by the SQA before staff members receive their formal qualification. The company are able to train any number of staff at any given time, as the standards are embedded into their ongoing staff training and development.

GL Floors is now one of the few companies in the construction field to offer this standard of in-house training. Investing in the workforce to such a degree brings obvious commercial benefits – increased job satisfaction for staff and a subsequent increase in staff retention, increased skills in the workforce, ability to attract the best staff available and the development of the company's reputation for quality craftsmanship. In addition to these benefits, GL Floors also found the process to be beneficial in other, less obvious ways – the development process helped them to focus on the quality of their work and bring the particular skills in the company into sharp relief. They have also found that embedding the VQ into the business has attracted young employees by providing a recognised training route in a national qualification.

The SVQ course is required for workers to obtain the Construction Site Certification Scheme (CSCS) card, which grants the holder access to most major building sites. This accreditation is the recognised national standard for all site workers in the UK.

From the college's perspective, this partnership has been an enjoyable and educational experience. Having such a long-term partnership with such a forward-thinking company has brought many benefits to the college. It has allowed us to hone our skills in working in tightly run partnership with businesses and has confirmed the benefits of the work-based VQ systems as an effective tool for businesses and education. Working so closely with an industry partner has also helped us to assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning at the college and its relevance to industry needs. It has helped keep us fresh, and reminded us of the importance of tailoring teaching to professional requirements.

The model we have established through our partnership with GL Floors is simple and effective and we hope to be able to roll it out across a range of industries. Working closely with a company to embed formal, nationally recognised qualifications into in-house training provision is a long process, but a rewarding one for everyone involved. I hope to see similar programmes meeting a range of industry needs in the not-too-distant future.