

INNOVATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LARGE ORGANISATIONS

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Premier Technical Services Group plc - Niche specialist service provider

Premier Technical Services Group, founded in 2007, is the UK's leading supplier of façade access and fall arrest equipment, electrical services, high-level cleaning and training solutions. It identified the need for one organisation to provide multiple niche specialist services and now offers a 'bundled services provision' enabling customers to receive products and services from its four divisions.

During the past 10 years and through 23 acquisitions it has established 17 service centres nationwide, recruited 641 highly trained staff, and now serves a customer base of 17,000 companies and 150,000 assets. It has also won 12 top industry awards.

The company has placed a strong emphasis on training and professional development, and in 2015 it invested £1 million in establishing a training centre, appointing a group assessor to become a CITB-approved training organisation (ATO), and is now helping to training applicants seeking grant-funded training through the Construction Trainee Directory – a task the company sees as vital to address the post-Brexit skills gap.

Best practice learning points:

- Spotting a gap in the market by pulling together differing but complementary and cohesive FM/construction disciplines.
- The PTSG team showed forethought and astuteness by anticipating the possible ramifications of a Leave vote in the 2016 referendum by aiming to close up the likely skills gap by investing in training for all its disciplines.
- A dedication to providing the highest quality of customer service at the most competitive prices.
- Building on its offer by nurturing a team of highly skilled and qualified operatives as trainers.
- Elaborating on its training ethos by collaborating with other industry organisations in symbiotic relationships.

Starting position

In light of the fact that many of the EU nationals who make up about a quarter of the construction industry's workforce could soon be leaving the UK, PTSG decided that the focus of its entry for the Innovation in Professional Development for Large Organisations award should be its by now well-established NVQ programme to help to resolve the skills shortage – at its own expense and in its own time.

Much of the company's work is undertaken at height, which the Health & Safety executive rates as the most dangerous activity for any organisation and one of the biggest causes of serious injuries and fatalities.

PTSG collaborated with SAEMA (Specialist Access Engineering & Maintenance Association) in training PTSG's IOSH health and safety consultant all-rounder, Paul Campbell, to become a qualified group NVQ assessor. Campbell's expertise embraces qualifications in steeple jacking, occupational safety and health, lightning protection, suspended platforms and fire services. His input and organisational skills made his ideal for carrying out inductions, portfolios and submission for verification of engineers' vocational qualifications in lightning protection, steeple jacking, fire services, fall arrest installations and building maintenance units. His input was instrumental in the company being confirmed as an Approved Training Organisation by the Construction Industry Training Board. This has opened up opportunities for operatives across the industry to gain accreditation through SAEMA.

Action taken

PTSG from day one set about enabling its staff to become as highly skilled as possible to meet and exceed customers' objectives. A skills audit was conducted to ascertain any underused skills and recognise what would be needed for the company to progress. When Brexit became a reality – opening up the threat of a large proportion of skilled workers leaving the UK industry – the NVQ programme was already established and succeeding.

It was developed specifically to upskill the company's engineers and operatives in the areas of cradle installation and maintenance, lightning protection and fire services. The company says it is the UK's leading lightning protection installation, testing and maintenance business, services that are provided as part of its electrical services division, who's its size equals that of the Access & Safety division. Through investment in its training and development centre, whereby it delivers a wide range of personally and professionally tailored course, PTSG aims to continually innovate to add value. By 2017 the company offered 64 different training courses, 35 of which are relevant to the sector it operates in.

PTSG is also a member of ATLAS (the Association of Technical Lighting & Access Specialists), which represents the lightning protection and steeplejack industry. With the support of ATLAS, PTSG is training all of its engineers to NVQ Level 3 standard in both testing and inspection of installations. The company will also make sure that engineers are either SSSTS or SMSTS-accredited as needed. The NVQ programme was also extended to those involved in working at height, and to the cradles and fire services divisions.

PTSG is assiduous in its use of key performance indicators and the collection of data on accident and incident frequency rates, near misses and close calls,

which has informed its professional development programme.

PTSG's NVQ group assessor travels to its 17 operation centres to assess the engineers working towards attaining their vocational qualifications – the regulatory process is robust and guarantees at each candidate reaches the required standard.

PTSG's programme, being CITB-certified, is also listed on the official register of training organisations, and with a database of 2.5 million construction workers able to access this high-quality route into becoming a qualified engineer, recognised by the industry's leading regulatory bodies.

Final position

PTSG has been revelatory by contributing to the re-establishment of the NVQ Level 2 in Permanent Suspended Access Equipment, which was almost discontinued owing to a lack of engineers taking it and assessors accredited to award it. This has allowed more operatives across the industry to achieve accreditation through SAEMA – including other members of PTSG's access maintenance and testing teams.

The company has been commended on the quality of its NVQ programme, both internally and by stakeholders who have offered their endorsements.

In April a new set of CITB training standards was ushered in to make an individual's skills transferable across the UK's construction sector. This includes a searchable online directory of training courses, tests and qualifications delivered by ATOs like PTSG to defined training standards that have been developed with input from the industry. On successful completion of a training course, a learner can have his achievement confirmed by PTSG and details uploaded to the Construction Training Register. This triggers the automated grant process, speeding up the payment process and removing the need for employers to complete paperwork. It will soon be a standard requirement for engineers delivering niche specialist services to hold NVQ Level 3 training and SSSTS and MSTS accredited. PTSG – through its innovative professional development programme – is already meeting this requirement.

And PTSG maintains that if this forces its competitors to change or adopt a similar course of action, it would have a positive impact on the whole industry.

The judges said...

PTSG has taken a proactive approach towards training its team in a highly specialised market for both now and the future, thus enabling the company to differentiate itself in the market. Its investment in the training academy, the strategic commitment to extending training within its client base and its numerous accreditations enable benefits across the sector.