



Scottish Prison Service College

Malcolm Grant is Head of Training Standards at Scottish Prison Service College (SPSC), the organisation responsible for the design and delivery of all prison staff training in Scotland.

National Occupational Standards (NOS) are at the heart of the training SPSC provides. Malcolm believes that basing training on NOS standardises the courses and, as a direct consequence, staff performance.

For many years SPSC has strived to ensure that it met the highest quality standards, and has long held badges of quality such as liP and others.

However, when Skills for Justice first advertised for early implementers of Skillsmark, its new training and development quality mark in 2005, Malcolm knew he wanted to be involved:

'It was clear from the outset that Skillsmark was a robust quality assurance framework and we felt it was very timely and relevant. What's more, the fact that it asked for learning programmes to be based on NOS, meant that it very much tied in with our existing thinking.'

Skillsmark is the only quality mark to focus solely on training and development within the Justice sector. It is awarded to learning providers who have gone through a rigorous assessment process and have been recognised as providing high quality learning programmes, relevant to the needs of the Justice sector.

SPSC first gained Skillsmark recognition back in November 2005 and was among the first tranche of Skillsmark recognised providers to receive their awards at the official Skillsmark launch in March 2006.

Getting to that stage was no easy task - Malcolm needed to get staff and stakeholders on board. To do this he had to communicate what he was trying to achieve, and what was going to be required in order to achieve it. He says:

'Staff buy-in was vitally important. After all, we were talking about making changes to procedures and ways of working, and at the end of the day these were the people who were going to be carrying all that out day-to-day.'

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It didn't take long to get everyone on board, and in order to get ready for their review, SPSC put in a significant amount of work to realign existing business practices to increase their effectiveness and efficiency.

Following their success in achieving recognised provider status, SPSC soon moved on to the next stage. They have so far submitted four of their programmes for Skillsmark endorsement, and have been successful each time.

The programmes are:

- Custodial Care SVQ Learning Programme
- A1 Assessor SVQ Learning Programme
- A2 Assessor Training Programme
- Local Negotiators Training Programme

The latter is a programme aimed at staff who may find themselves in serious situations that require excellent negotiation skills. An example might be if a prisoner barricaded and 'took over' a section of the prison. This programme equips staff with the skills needed to talk their way to a peaceful resolution.

So what's next for SPSC? Well they're already working on their next submission, a staff IT training programme. Malcolm says:

'We've benefited from our involvement in Skillsmark in many ways. It has prompted us to consolidate and improve business practices, and provided a focus for management on quality assurance.

'Most importantly, we have adopted a process that requires us to constantly strive to improve.'

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