

In Confidence



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE



Quality South West

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
ASSESSMENT REPORT**

For

pluss

Assessors: Kevin Phillips and Sharon Storr

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Assessment Plan

1. OUTCOME

pluss complies with the requirements of the Investors in People Standard. I am pleased to confirm that there are no actions required to meet the Standard, following this successful assessment visit.



Lead assessor

10th November 2005

2. STRENGTHS AND AREAS OF GOOD PRACTICE

- The whole purpose of pluss is to develop its people in order to enable them, where appropriate, to gain paid employment. It achieves this purpose admirably effectively.
- The company has begun an impressive Training Needs Analysis, specifying the skills and qualifications needed for each role.
- Supervision is conducted very frequently and regularly in most cases.
- There is a spirit of continuous improvement evident in the company's planning and operations. It is impressive that so much has been achieved in such a short time, in taking the best of three disparate systems, and developing new policies and procedures for the newly-integrated company. New procedures, such as the appraisal system, are being piloted before being introduced.
- Managers demonstrate a flexible approach to meeting staff's personal needs, and provide very strong support for their development. Typical comments included:
'It's a very caring organisation. We're all well looked after.'
'I feel valued in this service.'
'If you've got a problem, they'll do everything they can for you.'
- Interviewees expressed a commendably clear understanding of what pluss is trying to achieve.
- Staff are committed and dedicated, with strong sense of teamwork.
- There was plentiful evidence of people training for new roles and promotions.
- The overwhelming majority of interviewees felt that the changes had been managed well, and that they now work for a better organisation.

3. FEEDBACK AGAINST AGREED OBJECTIVES

Communication and interaction across divisions.

There was generally positive feedback on this issue, although it has to be said that it was a 'mixed bag.' Typical comments included:

'Communication and working across the unitary authorities was a mess, but it's much better now. There's cross-divisional working, and it's great to have that interaction. There are inter-divisional meetings, and it does filter down.'

'Cross-group working is far better than it used to be. It's good to know who you're speaking to.'

'Communication across the divisions is very difficult. The divisions tend to work in isolation. People tend to have misconceptions of what the different bits do.'

'There's an improved cascade of information, but it would be nice to be able to meet supervisors from other units, especially the ones we do some work for.'

'Some of the distribution of policies and procedures could be more personal – it's no use putting something on the P drive without telling us it's there.'

4. POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

- It was apparent from the comments of some staff that management of one of the units is very weak. Induction in that unit, for example, was very poor. *'I was given an H&S manual to read, and that was it.'* It was clear that staff at this unit have made their feelings known to senior management, and that action is being taken to address the problem.
- Expedite plans to introduce the new the induction process, and monitor its effectiveness.
- Similarly, ensure that the new appraisal process is introduced as soon as possible.
- There is a need to check that all of the company's new procedures are applied consistently throughout all units.
- Some staff feel there is a need for more frequent Health and Safety 'refresher' training.
- Managers in the sheltered workshops could be more visible to staff. *'You get thanks from the supervisor, but you don't get anything from anyone higher up. They walk past you and don't even speak.'*
- Consider introducing some form of 360-degree feedback for managers. This may be especially useful for those who are managing on a 'matrix' basis.
- Issues regarding perceived unfairness in pay scales are adversely affecting morale in some locations. You are already aware of this and are dealing with it.

- Explore the possibility of introducing Investors in People Internal Review. This would fit well with your policy of self-assessment.
- In line with this, you might want to look at Quality South West's own website to maintain a view of the developments around the IIP Standard: <http://www.qualitysouthwest.co.uk/>. The Leadership and Management and Work Life Balance Models may be of particular interest to you.) With regard to Leadership and Management, <http://www.ashridge.org.uk/> includes access to some interesting reports and articles, whilst <http://www.leadershipsouthwest.com/> will provide you with lots of information from a more local source.
- Consider the benefits of having a 'Profile' Review next time.
- Check if any of the Health & Safety information available on the HSE website could be useful in maintaining both your compliance and staff awareness. Your Health & Safety Representative might consider if there are any issues that should be addressed: <http://www.hse.gov.uk>.
- Consider interactive training packages to continue to develop the IT skills and knowledge of your staff. Try <http://learnirect.co.uk> for ideas, a good number of these courses are either free of charge or reasonably priced.
- For some useful information on the whole area of employee consultation, try looking at either <http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/consultation/proposal.htm> or <http://www.partnership-at-work.com/>.
- For general business advice and employment legislation, incorporating DTI 'best practice', the following website might be useful: <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/>.

5. FINDINGS AGAINST EACH PRINCIPLE OF THE STANDARD

‘PLAN’ – Developing strategies to improve the performance of the organisation.

An Investor in People develops effective strategies to improve the performance of the organisation through its people.

- The Senior Management Team (SMT) has developed a business plan which sets clear objectives for the new company, showing how the mission and vision will be achieved.
- Each of the three divisions has contributed its own objectives to the plan, and it was clear from interviewees that there had been much consultation during the planning process.
- A number of road show presentations have been made, to ensure that the aims are clear. Comments about the plan and involvement in contributing towards it included the following:

‘We’ve had lots of meetings about what pluss aims to achieve.’

‘It’s all about getting disabled people out into a normal life, and giving them a purpose.’

‘There was a lot of bouncing around of ideas.’

‘We do client surveys regularly [clients being members of staff] and results are fed into the business plan.’

‘We have a team meeting to discuss what needs to be done that day. It’s surprising how many good ideas we get from the people who are actually doing the job.’

‘They get everyone in the canteen and give us all an update.’

- Union representatives confirmed that relationships with the SMT are constructive and consultative.
- A training needs analysis is currently in progress, but managers at all levels were able to describe their main priorities for staff development. These included:

Disability awareness

Customer service

Basic Skills

Health and Safety and mandatory training

Training to meet contractual requirements.

- The programme to develop these skills is well-defined. The vast majority of training needs are met in-house, as the company has its own training department and a number of trained trainers and teachers. Most evaluation is in-built, as courses are certificated.
- Appraisal, regular discussion of Personal Development Plans, regular supervision, and team meetings provide opportunity for everyone to contribute ideas. Interviewees confirmed this.

- Equality of opportunity is at the heart of everything pluss does. Managers go to great lengths to get to know the different needs of their people, and to ensure these needs are met.

'You're all level pegging, and the opportunities are there for everyone.'

- All staff have undertaken an in-house course on Acceptable Behaviour and Equal Opportunities.
- A standard attribute listed in the people specification of job descriptions is *'empathy towards people with a disability, particularly their employment and training needs.'*
- The vast majority of interviewees felt that *'pluss as an organisation is very good at training people.'*
- Managers' job descriptions spell out the purpose of the job, principal accountabilities (including those for leading, managing and developing staff) and the knowledge, skills and attributes needed. All managers interviewed expressed a very clear understanding of what is expected of them, as did their staff:

'It's very well defined as to what we're expected to do. My role is to make sure that people a) have the opportunity to aspire to what they want to be and b) have the training they need to do it. I like to think I'm their champion.'

'There's an expectation that managers will be caring.'

'There's a culture to do the best for each person.'

'The whole culture is to train.'

'Our job is to make sure our staff are trained properly.'

'He's very keen for me to do further training and personal development.'

- The company is developing its own NVQ assessors and supports various training and teaching qualifications, as well as NVQs and other management qualifications.

'DO' – Taking action to improve the performance of the organisation.

An Investor in People takes effective action to improve the performance of the organisation through its people.

- Managers recognise that the most important aspect of their jobs is supporting the development of their people, and were able to provide plentiful examples of how they do this. Several managers summed up their position with words to the effect that: *'They're the oak tree – we're just the mistletoe on it.'*
- Their staff were enthusiastic about the levels of feedback, support, and encouragement they receive:

'We get absolutely brilliant support from our supervisor and our manager.'
'He's been fantastic – really positive about my progression.'
'They're very supportive – it's been like a second family to me.'
'I honestly can't praise the organisation enough. They've supported me 100%.'
'Every six months we get a personal development plan done. We talk about what we can do, and what we'd like to learn.'

- It was also clear from interviews that people feel their contribution is valued, and that they are encouraged at appropriate levels to take decisions, and to own those decisions:

'We let people have some independence. I tell them what we need to do, but that I don't mind how they do it, as long as they do it safely.'
'It's all about giving people the confidence to make decisions and to progress.'
'I think we are respected as individuals.'
'My job links very nicely into our mission statement.'
'You feel more confident, more valued.'
'I do the orders by doing the quickest ones first, so the money's coming in.'
'You're shown a way of doing things, but you can do it a different way if it suits you better.'
'They do listen to you, and take your ideas on board.'

- Managers are very actively involved in training and coaching their staff.
- Interviewees were able to provide many examples of how their needs had been met, and continue to be met. They were also able to explain the impact on their jobs:

'I would never have dreamed of using a computer before, but I was given a course and now I can do all sorts of things on it, like doing the work tickets.'
'We've learned how to shift things without getting injured.'
'We've learned how to work as a team, and how to talk to people in certain situations.'
'I can work more of the machines now. It means we get the jobs done faster.'

- Although induction has been somewhat inconsistent in the past, due to the use of three disparate systems, those staff who had undergone induction recently confirmed its effectiveness. Those staff who had changed jobs, including those who had been promoted, all felt they had received appropriate support and training.

'REVIEW' – Evaluating the impact on the performance of the organisation.

An Investor in People can demonstrate the impact of its investment in people on the performance of the organisation.

- Given that the whole ethos of this company is the development of its people, top managers have a clear understanding of their investment, and the return on that investment.
- Some of the many examples (from managers at all levels) of that return included the following:

'We've absorbed material prices through better efficiency.'

'We've trained people to do the job and we're now the best supplier Vi-Spring has had.'

'We've increased turnover 15% year on year.'

'We've achieved 98% success rate in meeting targets.'

'The most recent Adult Learning Inspectorate inspection rated us within the top 5 in the country.'

- Often the effectiveness of development activity for a person with severe disability is measured by what could be seen (by a casual observer) to be the slightest improvement in ability or confidence. This is rightly regarded as a major gain, contributing hugely to that person's developing independence.
- There were many examples of people's development enabling them to achieve the company's mission, i.e. their being able to take up unsupported employment elsewhere.
- There is strong evidence of the SMT using evaluation to inform its continuously improving strategy for staff development. Many interviewees referred to improved referral of training needs, sourcing of provision and tracking of training activity through the training section.
- Managers and staff were able to give many examples of improvements made, or in the process of being made:

'There's been a big take up on literacy and numeracy courses. We didn't used to do that.'

'We're more and more committed to progressing people and making sure they feel valued.'

'We've been kept more up to date.'

'We've had much more training than we used to get.'

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**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
ASSESSMENT PLAN**

For

pluss

Assessors: Kevin Phillips and Sharon Storr

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

pluss consists of a group of Supported Factories and specialist needs Units which has been derived from a organisation previously named Industrial Services Group (ISG).

pluss is managed by a Chief Executive Officer and Senior Management Team and is split functionally across the Group, into Working, Equipping and Manufacturing divisions.

Factories and Units are located throughout New Devon, Torbay and Plymouth, providing:-

- (i) WORKSTEP full-time paid employment for qualifying disabled people**
- (ii) WORKSTEP Supported Placement Scheme**
- (iii) mainstream employment opportunities**
- (iv) WORKPREP assessment of clients referred by DoE**
- (v) assistance to those with learning disabilities**
- (vi) Information advice and guidance on learning & work to external/internal clients**
- (vii) Training and education funded by the LSC**

Products manufactured and services provided vary considerably throughout the Group, ranging from production of shredded animal bedding, through electronic packaging to joinery and mobility aid manufacture/provision and installation of stair-lifts.

This is pluss' first assessment, although each of the units of the Industrial Services Group has been assessed and recognised in the past.

AGREED OBJECTIVES

- To confirm that pluss meets the requirements of the Standard for recognition as an Investor in People
- To provide feedback on opportunities for further improvement and continuous development.
- To provide feedback on cross-group/inter-divisional interaction and communication and induction.

SAMPLE DETAILS

Grade/Function of Employee (and any other People 'in scope')	Number Employed	Number Interviewed
Chief Executive	1	1
Divisional Managers	3	2
Managers	24	7
Supervisors/charge hands	38	7
Consultants/co-ordinators/ESWs	61	8
Admin/tech staff	109	14
Operatives	175	21
TOTALS	411	60
		= 14.5 %

Category of Employee	Number Employed	Number Interviewed
FULL TIME	358	52
PART TIME	53	8
MALE	270	40
FEMALE	141	20
RECENT STARTERS	42	7
REPRESENTATIVES	2	2
OTHERS (Please Detail)		

NUMBERS INTERVIEWED BY EACH METHOD:		Individuals	32
		Pairs	28
		Groups	
		By Telephone	
TOTAL NUMBER OF SITES:	4 main sites	NUMBER OF SITES COVERED:	4

ADDITIONAL NOTES

This assessment is to be conducted against the revised (current) version of the Standard.

Apportionment of time between the assessors (including, for lead assessor only, initial visit, planning, and consolidation of the two sets of notes):

Kevin Phillips: 4 days

Sharon Storr: 2.25 days

The interview sample is towards the higher end of the scale due to the number of separate sites (several in addition to the 4 main sites) and complex nature of this organisation.

ON SITE DATE(S):	8th September, 9th and 10th November 2005	REPORT SENT TO CLIENT BY:	2nd December 2005 (completion date)
TOTAL NUMBER OF DAYS:	6.25	TOTAL COST:	£3125.00 + VAT

The national daily rate for Investors in People assessments and reviews is £550 per day (plus VAT). Quality South West is able to provide a small subsidy and the cost for your assessment/review will therefore be £500 per day (plus VAT). Any travel expenses over 100 miles per day (charged at 40p per mile) and any other agreed expenses incurred will be invoiced directly to you by your assessor.

We agree to the costs as detailed above and have read and understood the terms and conditions contained within your ‘Employer’s Guide to the Assessment/Review Process’.

Signed:

Date: