

The Retail Industry a job or a worthwhile career?

How Sainsbury's is working with leading awarding body EDI to drive qualifications and career prospects in retail

Vocational and skills-based training across all employment sectors have never been more in demand. Traditionally however, the retail industry suffers from the perception that it does not offer comprehensive and appealing career prospects. Indeed figures from Skillsmart Retail, the council which represents the employer's voice on retail skills, reveal that 'approximately 56% of career advisors do not think that the sector offers top quality training and career development.'

Over the past few years, retail companies have been tackling this issue and are becoming increasingly focused on staff development and training. Sainsbury's, a major retail employer is one example. Being one of the first companies to sign the Skills Pledge, Sainsbury's was keen to add value to its in-house training programme and to offer its staff more opportunities to develop their skills and further their career prospects.

Over the past 3 years, the retailer has been working closely with both Skillsmart Retail and EDI, one of the UK's leading qualifications and assessment providers, to map its in-house training programmes with Retail NVQs and the Retail Apprenticeship.

Gary Tovey, Qualifications and Skills Manager at Sainsbury's, commented: "We needed to work with an awarding body that had a strong vocational orientation and that understood our business. Overlaying our training programme with more procedures, papers and qualifications simply would not work. We found EDI to be incredibly employer focused, helping us build the right solution for both our business and our staff. Working closely with both Skillsmart Retail and EDI has been fundamental in our understanding of the level 2 national occupational standards and the resulting NVQ qualifications. Through the process of mapping our training to the national qualifications, we have gained a real perspective on the standards that we should be expecting in terms of operations, customer service and working in retail."

The first programme to be mapped by Sainsbury's was the bakery section. Using a team of retail training designers and a subject expert, Sainsbury's worked with EDI to create all the necessary criteria and skill sets in order to deliver a NVQ qualification for retail bakery apprentices that was mapped to the in-house training programme. Gary commented: "We wanted to enable every apprentice to gain a valuable qualification and to help them build a much wider skill set – one that could form the basis of their career."



All apprentices now receive official certification for completion of the in-house training programme and the reaction from these apprentices has been overwhelmingly positive. Sean Barras, a bakery apprentice in Cramlington Store commented: "I'm really proud to have gained this qualification. It has really helped me to become a better baker and will help me with my ambition to progress to Bakery Customer Trading Support."

Gary added: "We are already reaping the benefits from a more motivated, valued and career orientated staff. Through the programme we have already identified future managers and many apprentices, like Sean, have now moved on to customer trading support – the equivalent of supervisor."



The successful implementation of the retail bakery apprenticeship led to Sainsbury's mapping both its Meat and Fish programmes to the Retail NVQ in the second quarter of 2007. Between April 2008 and March 2009, the company plans to recruit over 200 apprentices, all of whom will be offered the opportunity to gain NVQ qualifications in the specific product areas. And with the company already looking at widening the programmes across all areas, employees will be able to build their skills across a number of departments. Ultimately Sainsbury's wants to extend this training opportunity to all of its 40,000 new starters – a vision that when realised, will help place the retail sector firmly on the UK careers map.

Gary commented: "Aligning our training programmes with national qualifications is all part of our recovery plan and is helping to make Sainsbury's great again. Knowing that our employees are fully trained to level 2 ensures that we are operationally competent and efficient and that we are providing the best possible service to both our customers and our colleagues."

He added: "We are committed to giving all of our colleagues the opportunity to develop as much as possible and ensuring that they have access to the right career progression. With our mapped training programmes, our employees are not only developing themselves as individuals but are gaining qualifications and skills for life, giving them a greater sense of confidence in their own ability and a real pride in their achievements."



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