



case study 11



Orkney
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COMPANY PROFILE

Northlink Ferries Ltd

Company structure

NorthLink Ferries Ltd was established in 2000 and is co-owned by Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd and the Royal Bank of Scotland. The company tendered for the Northern Isles ferry routes and took over the service in October 2002. It employs 80 staff based in five terminals: Aberdeen, Kirkwall, Lerwick, Scrabster and Stromness; and at offices in Orkney.

Area of expertise

Provision of lifeline ferry services to the Northern Isles for islander and visitor traffic, cargo and livestock. Operation of a convenient, comfortable and safe service that fully meets the needs of customers.

Business objectives

To maintain a regular and reliable service between the Northern Isles and the Scottish mainland; to offer islanders and visitors an enjoyable journey at an affordable price; and to facilitate efficient transportation of essential freight to and from the Northern Isles.

Training strategy

NorthLink Ferries has focused its training strategy on improving customer service operations across the company. It is built around a framework provided by national vocational qualifications, using an external consultant to help the company define standards and coach staff towards their achievement.

Training outcomes

The comprehensive customer service training developed by the company is designed to deliver a consistent level of service across the business. It will also allow individual members of staff to gain accreditation and recognition for their efforts.



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Heading for better customer service standards – Northlink Ferries Ltd

‘We are currently developing training materials that will be geared directly to the needs of NorthLink Ferries’



For a company operating out of five ferry terminals and dealing with nearly 300,000 customers a year, setting and achieving a consistent level of service is a priority for NorthLink Ferries Ltd.

Gareth Crichton, Commercial Director with the company, explains the reasons behind the development of a unique NorthLink customer service standard.

“The company covers a large geographical area and it is important that staff in all five terminals from Stromness to Aberdeen – as well as in our customer service operation in Kirkwall – recognise the basic standards we as a company should aim to meet. To achieve consistency, we have enlisted the help of David Brown Training to support us in our own development work and allow us to determine what those standards should be and how we can work to meet them.”

An in-house Customer Service Forum was set-up in September 2004 with the remit of establishing a framework for setting and assessing standards with a built-in review structure.

“We are currently developing training materials that will be geared directly to the needs of NorthLink Ferries,” says Gareth. “The materials follow the SVQ framework but also integrate company procedures and practices to create very focused training units. The next step will be to gain SVQ approval for the materials and then to offer employees the opportunity to work towards accreditation.”

Gareth points out that it is the achievement of the standard – not the qualification – that is important to the company.

“Undertaking assessment for the qualification is voluntary – but the delivery of consistent standards across the company is mandatory. It is the process itself that is of primary importance here, but for our employees, accreditation shows that they are aware of the standards we aim to meet and are committed to delivering them.”



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