



Alfred Bagnall & Sons: using National Occupational Standards to survive a recession and keep on top of the markets

Background

Founded in 1875, Bagnalls is a privately owned painting and decorating company specialising in industrial and commercial work. There are 15 branches throughout the country and its head office is in Shipley, West Yorkshire. Projects vary in size from £5,000 to £5,000,000 and commissions range from pre-branding Esporta gyms to Virgin Active, a national vessel painting programme for BOC Gas and working in high risk environments for National Grid. In addition, Bagnalls have repainted the Billy Wright Stand at Wolverhampton Football Club, and has a dedicated team of painters assigned to maintain universities such as Leeds, Durham and Warwick. The company has long held a reputation for supporting apprentices, many of whom remain in the workforce 30 years after completing their training.

Among the 600 employees are apprentices, trade painters and decorators, supervisors and foremen. The company has 44 apprentices specialising in painting and decorating, each attending a college which is local to their branch and all studying for their national qualifications

Adapting National Occupational Standards (NOS) to a specific industry

National Occupational Standards (NOS) are central to Bagnall's Apprenticeship Scheme. David Sunderland, Group Technical and Training Manager states:

"The NOS framework is built into the qualifications in conjunction with our industry trade body, the Painting and Decorating Association (PDA). It is vital in our industry that we keep up with technical requirements and maintain the high standards expected of us. The PDA has representations to implement any amendments that are required in the NOS. This demonstrates the versatility of the qualification which thereby ensures that our apprentices are learning the most relevant information within their college curriculum."

The qualification, which Bagnall's apprentices take at Level 2 and 3, is recognised and well-respected within the painting and decorating industry.



Defending the industry against recession

NOS have been designed to meet industry requirements to ensure that they remain relevant to the requirements of today's market factors. Levels 2 and 3 in Decorative Finishing and Painting are based on standards which cover painting, health and safety, and the craft element of the work. Knowledge of both the craft and the practicalities of the business are also required.

Despite companies such as Bagnall's adhering to rigorous training throughout the workforce, the industry is continually under pressure to defend itself against the recession. It is also subject to shifting trends, which can involve additional costly training for the workforce, and it has to follow new EU legislation. As David says:

"We have to offer our customers the best service with a properly qualified workforce. In order to capture new business and ensure repeat business from our existing clients we need to demonstrate how pro-active we are and that we adhere to high standards. NOS provide that benchmark for us all."

Keeping the standards relevant in today's market

Training at Bagnall's is regarded as a high priority and this is demonstrated by an internal Academy where training is designed to develop skills at all levels. The apprentices' NOS at Levels 2 and 3 are also complemented with this in-house tuition programme.

"Over the years," says David, "we have had to tweak NOS in line with what is required by the industry. In one instance, the changes to the standards related to the use of technology. Some of the older requirements were no longer relevant and we cannot afford not to move with the times. It is excellent that NOS evolve according to industry demands and such flexibility is a very positive element to an already essential tool in our apprentices' training."

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