

## anecdote

# World Class Skills

By Rob Macleod, MD of Assessment North East

**I was lucky enough to attend a recent event run by Skills North East entitled “World Class Skills - what’s in it for me?” The event, aimed at North East employers, highlighted the challenges we face in the North East concerning skills and the lack of them. As part of the event ANE ran a workshop on ‘making training pay’ promoting the idea that better skills does lead to business improvement if planned and executed properly. Those of you who are an Investor in People will of course be very familiar with this.**

For me, the event highlighted the stark difference between the skills levels we have in the North East and the other regions of the UK, let alone our overseas competitors. I’ve lived and worked in the North East for the last 20 years and I’m proud to call it home. So I felt some real dismay that we’re not higher up in the ‘league of skills’, when we have so many things to be proud of.

Even more significantly for us as a nation, Leitch challenged our complacent thinking that we would continue as one of the highly developed, prosperous nations. It challenged us not to just think about ourselves in the context of our European cousins but all the emerging power house economies of China and India, who are educating their workforce to degree level in huge numbers every year. Indeed at another event I attended a speaker commented that our children are likely to be working for a Chinese-owned business in 20 years time. An uncomfortable thought maybe? But what this does highlight to me is the importance of our work in the

North East, not just making training pay but improving organisational performance as well.

A key area through which organisations can improve their performance is developing their peoples’ skills; this is one of the key recommendations of Leitch (who identified IIP as a standard to aspire to ensure skills needs are addressed in line with business objectives). To encourage skills development the Government, through the Learning and Skills Council, launched ‘Train to Gain’ and the ‘Skills Pledge’ to sit alongside IIP. IIP helps to establish which development activities will help our organisations to improve and Train to Gain can assist us to get the best providers to deliver the training and help us to fund it. If this is something you’d like more information about please contact us or your Business Link advisor.

The competition for skills is becoming increasingly global, typified by Australia relaxing its immigration rules recently. So for the North East, each of us needs to contribute to increasing our skill levels, be that our own or the

people we work with. That way we can collectively enjoy a richer, more sustainable life. It’s not for the Government to do this for us or to

us - it’s down to you and me. Can we afford not to? Please influence your organisation to make the Skills Pledge, it makes so much sense.



**Our future. It’s in our hands.**

**Take control. The future is in your hands. To improve your skills please call 0191 516 6464.**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



# The IIP Journey

Results from recent studies have shown that IIP recognised clients would value more regular contact from their assessment centre. In particular, clients confirmed that they would welcome assistance with organisation development and progress updates.

In response to this feedback a trial was set up to provide additional tools, development advice and progress check services throughout the 3-year period between reviews, as illustrated in the diagram opposite. ANE has sourced and tested a number of tools to assist organisations with:

- management effectiveness
- maximising return from training
- identifying areas for development
- action planning
- managing change for improvement
- monitoring/evaluating improvement activities

To make the most of your IIP journey speak to your assessor or contact Kay Lindsay on 0191 516 6487. Some activities are eligible for funding and many tools are free.

- Assessor/Advisor visits
- organisation development
- support from ANE



**Be among the first to take advantage of this new, free on-line business support tool to help you to work with the Investors in People Standard in your time, at your pace.**

It guides you through a diagnostic process, through development activities and helps you achieve improvements to your business.

The tool works around five management practices:

You can access:

- Information
- Advice
- Downloads
- Templates
- Case studies



Visit [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/interactive](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/interactive) to register and get started

for expert advice call 0191 516 6464

varying levels of support  
can be provided

# Building Success

**Dale Robinson, owner of award winning house builder Stone Homes, has spoken to ANECDOTE about its experiences of working towards Investors in People through a workshop based programme.**



Stone Homes' Adderston Mains development, 'The Mill House', in Northumberland

"As a business we already had the Investors in People philosophy embedded in the way we worked, but taking part in the programme has definitely helped us to improve and accelerate our staff development to another level.

It has been a breath of fresh air to spend time with a group of like-minded business people, sharing thoughts and experiences and I've come away with some tangible ideas to implement. For example, we have introduced an incentive scheme whereby if the team meets their targets they get a bonus half day off at the

month end. The company benefits twice; we get a team that works together to achieve shared targets plus productivity increases.

We're now planning a strategy day for the Autumn when we will look at where we are going and how each member of the team will contribute to the goals we set.

There is no doubt that we will have a better business as a result of doing the Investors in People programme and I'm looking forward to going for formal accreditation at the end of the year."

## Who is Stone Homes?

Stone Homes is a small family run business with a very 'hands-on approach'. Now in its sixth trading year, Stone Homes has built up a successful team of local professionals and tradesmen who construct bespoke properties in local sandstone and used Welsh slate to give an aged appearance. It employs nine people and works closely with ten subcontractors.

## Business Development through Investors in People Programme

The programme is delivered through a series of six half day workshops supplemented with one to one advisory support. It guides organisations through the Investors in People Standard, enabling them to work towards and achieve the Investors in People Award.

**For more information about the programme, contact Kay Lindsay at Assessment North East on [info@aneltd.co.uk](mailto:info@aneltd.co.uk)**

for expert advice call 0191 516 6464

improve and accelerate our staff development  
to another level

# Driving Success



International project and cost management consultants Faithful+Gould has been recognised as an Investor in People since 1998 and is still absolutely convinced of the Standard's value as a tool to drive success for the business. ANECDOTE spoke to Senior HR Advisor James Greaves to learn more about their experiences:

"When we sell our services we are in fact selling our people and their skills and experience so we wanted a tool that showed the importance we placed in their development to those inside and outside the organisation, and the IIP Standard seemed to fit the bill perfectly. As we work both nationally and internationally, we also wanted an accreditation that had the gravitas to be recognised and appreciated by our clients, which IIP also provided.

We have since learned that it is so much more than this. IIP has helped us to 'join up the dots' when looking at the organisation, as the criteria within the Standard show how all the parts of the business fit together. For example, it reinforced to us the reality that having a Corporate Strategy is meaningless by itself, only by communicating it effectively to your team, seeking their feedback and interacting with them on the progress will your strategy become more than just words on a piece of paper. Then IIP prompts you to go even further down this road by ensuring your learning and development aims and processes are aligned with achieving your strategic goals. All this may sound obvious but when running a busy business it is good to have a structure in place to keep reminding you.

We have gained a lot from working with Investors in People in the past ten years and we are clear that as a knowledge-based organisation, it is the development of our staff's skills through life long learning that keeps us at the top of our game. We are operating in a very tight labour market and we see having IIP as a very positive factor in the recruitment and retention of staff. In our sector, finding new staff is a challenge but we do it and not just that, once we have them, we keep them.

One of the most pleasing revelations was that when you give a voice to staff in the decision



making process they have many ideas and 2000 heads are definitely better than !!

The next challenge for Faithful+Gould is to try and improve communication within the organisation. We have made great progress in keeping employees informed of what we are trying to achieve and how far we are along the road to achieving our goals. We were very pleased to see in our recent IIP report that our people recognise the work that we have put into this. We all know, however, communication is a two way process and we are now looking at different ways to improve how staff can have their say in both our strategic and operational direction.

For organisations thinking about Investors in People I would suggest they look at the framework as a whole to see how all the individual criteria support each other. This way you will understand that the Standard is actually describing a way to improve the performance of your business."

## Who is Faithful+Gould?

**Faithful+Gould works across the UK, Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and the USA providing project and cost management consultancy services to clients in the transport, property and industry sectors.**

With a turnover in excess of £120 million, Faithful+Gould has around 2,000 staff and is a member of the Atkins Group.

Faithful+Gould has two offices in the North East, Newcastle and Stockton-on-Tees.



To share your success stories, contact Alison Davies at [alisond@aneltd.co.uk](mailto:alisond@aneltd.co.uk)

for expert advice call 0191 516 6464

when we sell our services,  
we are in fact selling our people

# On the Buses



**Go North East has held Investors in People recognition since the 1990s and has learned much in the course of its journey. At a recent Review they turned the tables on their Assessor Peter Jackson and challenged him to learn to drive a bus!**

**ANECDOTE spoke to Peter to hear about his experiences and to Recruitment and Development Manager Ian Coull to learn more about why they continue to use the Investors in People Standard in the business.**

## Peter's story:

As I carry out IIP assessments I often reflect on the degree of difficulty inherent in different job roles and responsibilities and, I guess, I form judgements on whether or not I could actually do the job of the people that I interview.

However nothing quite prepared me for the challenge that came from learning to drive a Go North East bus! The idea was for me to receive training as if I was a new recruit so I could experience their initial induction for myself and help them to publicise their recent successful IIP review.

I've driven a car for over 30 years so I did have quite a bit of prior learning to fall back on, or so I thought. The first thing that struck me when I climbed into the cab was the sheer scale of things! Everything was on a much larger scale and the gear stick seemed to be about three feet long. Finding gears was an art form in its own right and seemed to be like stirring porridge. Steering and control presented their own unique set of problems and the severity of the brakes took some time to master. I had an excellent instructor though and in no time at all he built my confidence and I actually managed to get into fourth gear at one stage. In true IIP style I received some very constructive feedback from my instructor on how I had performed which I felt was very fair.

I have to say that I now have a new-found respect for all bus drivers, bearing in mind that I did not have to deal with the public, handle the ticket machine, the range of concessionary fares or the problems associated with driving on today's busy roads."

## Go North East's IIP Journey:

"Originally we used IIP to benchmark best practice in staff development and communication. It made us look at how we trained, developed, motivated and communicated with our employees and encouraged us to develop a culture and systems to support this.

We introduced lots of new practices such as new ways to communicate with our drivers who spend very little time with their managers. We brought in depot forums, cross functional working groups and canteen surgery briefings to address this. We also vastly improved our induction programme which contributed to a 50% reduction in driver turnover.

We now recognise that by continuing to measure ourselves against the Standard we are working towards ongoing improved performance



Peter Jackson takes the wheel!

through our people. The revised Standard is particularly helpful to enable the development of people within the organisation. For example, the new requirement for people to 'describe what their managers should be doing to lead, manage and develop them effectively' is helping us to improve our succession planning and cross functional promotions."

## Who is Go North East?

It operates a large fleet of over 600 buses.

Go North East employs 2000 staff, of which 1600 are bus drivers.

The company handles over 70 million passenger journeys per year in Tyne & Wear, County Durham, parts of Northumberland, Hartlepool and Teesside.

Go North East is part of the Go-Ahead Group.

for expert advice call 0191 516 6464

**we are working towards ongoing improved performance**  
through our people

# Managing 'Sickies'



by Steve Cave, HR Consultant

**Having a percentage of your employees absent from work due to sickness is a problem shared by organisations large and small. But how does your organisation compare with others? I have just completed a survey of absence for the 'North East Employers Network' (a network of 60 companies, mainly large manufacturing companies) and can share some of the key findings.**

The first step is to understand your absence levels. If you don't know yours, it is probably worse than you think! The survey revealed a low absence rate of 1.5% and a high of 4.9% with an average rate of 2.8%, which equates to 5 days sickness per employee per year. The regional average for the North East is 3.7%, but this is distorted by a high public sector figure. I recently worked with a public sector organisation that had a rate of 16 days per employee! So if your percentage rate is less than 3%, you are doing OK and can stop reading now and look smug. If not then read on.

Almost all the companies responding reported that they had some form of sick pay scheme with only one company offering no sick pay. Length of payment differed considerably from a few weeks to six months full and six months half pay. Most companies linked length of service to increasing sick pay.

Every company undertook back to work interviews as a minimum, and a large number of respondents mentioned other measures such as home visits and medical referrals as part of their management of absence.

When we asked companies 'when do you take action on employee sickness' the responses showed a split of 40% favouring a 'Bradford factor' type system and 60% favouring a number of incidents system.

65% of respondents reported using medicals at recruitment stage. All respondents asked job applicants to complete health questionnaires



at recruitment stage.

Two thirds of the respondents reported they had access to occupational health services, in house or through an external service.

## Characteristics of best performing companies

Comparison of individual results shows that the companies with the lowest levels of absence share the following characteristics.

- Good sick pay schemes
- Use of health questionnaires & medicals at recruitment stage
- Use of occupational health services during employment
- Close monitoring of absence statistics
- Home visits
- Publication of team absence rates

## What is the Bradford Factor?

The Bradford Factor or Bradford Formula is used as a means of measuring absenteeism. The theory is that short, frequent, and usually unplanned absences are more disruptive than longer absences.

The Bradford Factor is calculated as follows:

where: **B** is the Bradford Factor score

**S** is the number of contiguous occasions of absence during the last 52 weeks

**D** is the total number of days absence during the last 52 weeks

For example: One single absence of 10 days is 10 points ( $1 \times 1 \times 10$ )

Five absences of 2 days each is 250 points ( $5 \times 5 \times 10$ )

The number of Bradford points that trigger an absence review varies widely. I have come across 27 points (in a 13-week period) to 350 (over a 52 week period). Often the process starts at around 50 points, which prompts an initial review.

**To learn more about effective absence management Steve Cave can be contacted at [steve@myhrpeople.com](mailto:steve@myhrpeople.com)**

for expert advice call 0191 516 6464

**The first step is to understand your sickness levels**

# Employment Law Update



By Emily Cox, Solicitor, Employment team, Dickinson Dees LLP

**Would you assume that an employer has the right to monitor the use of email, internet and telephones in the workplace? Well, you could be wrong. Emily Cox, solicitor at Dickinson Dees, outlines recent developments in law that need to be considered by all employers.**

"The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has recently ruled that to monitor an employee's email, telephone and internet use was a breach of rights under the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (the Convention). The Government (against which this case was brought, as the defendant employer was a publicly-funded body) admitted that an employee's telephone calls, emails and internet use had been monitored over a period of months. Telephone calls from business premises are included in the concepts of private life and correspondence which are protected by the Convention, and the ECHR held that it followed that emails sent from work should be similarly protected, as should information obtained by monitoring internet use.

The key issue was that the employee in this case was not warned that she would be monitored, and therefore had a reasonable expectation of privacy. As a result, the collection and storage of information without her knowledge amounted to an interference with

her human rights. However, if an employee does not have a reasonable expectation of privacy, i.e. has been warned that monitoring will take place, an employer will be able to monitor calls, and emails, subject to an overriding requirement of proportionality. Employers should therefore put in place a well-publicised computer use policy, if monitoring will be undertaken.

Although the Human Rights Act 1998 which incorporates the ECHR into UK law is only directly enforceable against public authorities, so employees in the private sector do not have a direct remedy for breach of ECHR rights, the courts, including employment tribunals, are themselves public authorities, and are bound to apply domestic law in a way that is compatible with the ECHR as far as possible, and must not act in a way that is incompatible with the ECHR.

The provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) cover employee monitoring, and guidance for employers on how to comply with their obligations under the DPA has been

issued in a code of practice, (the Code) available from the Information Commissioner's website at [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk).

The Code recognises that monitoring is part of the employment relationship, which is expected to a certain degree by most employees, and sets out a range of recommendations. These include the fact that policies should identify unacceptable and acceptable use of email, internet and telephone systems, using examples.

In relation to video or audio monitoring, these should be targeted at areas where workers have a low expectation of privacy, and both employees and visitors should be made aware of the fact such monitoring is taking place, and why. Any covert monitoring must be authorised at senior level, and only used in a strictly targeted way, for a pre-determined time, and only where criminal activity is suspected. It should not be carried out in areas where there is a high expectation of privacy, e.g. cloakrooms, unless there is a suspicion of serious crime and an intention to involve the police."

**For more information, please email [emily.cox@dickinson-dees.com](mailto:emily.cox@dickinson-dees.com) or call 0191 279 9286**

**Our future. It's in our hands.**

**Take control. The future is in your hands. To improve your skills please call 0191 516 6464.**



for expert advice call 0191 516 6464

**the employee was not warned that she would be monitored**

IIP



## the Superbrand!

Investors in People has been announced as one of the UK's Business Superbrands for 2007. This is granted to brands judged to represent quality, reliability and distinction which have established a sound reputation and offer customers significant advantages over competitors.

Investors in People is now used by over 60,000 organisations across the public and private sectors, which employ one third of the UK workforce. These include 52 of The Sunday Times' 100 Best Companies to 'Work For'. The brand has also been exported successfully to 27 companies across the globe.

The process of becoming a Superbrand involves independent assessments and market research resulting in a final list of brands confirmed as Business Superbrands.

There are lots of ways organisations with Investors in People recognition can promote their association with the brand with plaques, mugs, pens, flags and a raft of other promotional items.

**To find out more about Investors in People or how to ensure you publicise your IIP accreditation effectively, contact Kay Lindsay at Assessment North East using [info@aneltd.co.uk](mailto:info@aneltd.co.uk)**

## Workshop Dates

WORKSHOP	2007/08 DATES
<b>Investors in People</b>	
<b>Preparing for Your Review</b>	26 November 8 January 4 February
<b>The Investors in People Profile Explained</b>	14 February
<b>The Investors in People Standard Explained</b>	20 November
<b>The Investors in People Internal Champions (3 days)</b>	29 Jan, 6 & 7 Feb
<b>Making Training Pay</b>	5 December
<b>ISO</b>	
<b>Internal Audits</b>	January
For more details please contact Kay Lindsay on <a href="mailto:info@aneltd.co.uk">info@aneltd.co.uk</a>	
<b>NB: All courses and workshops are available as an 'in-house' option and may be subject to 50% funding</b>	

## Management Development

As ANECDOTE reported in the last issue, Assessment North East is now accredited to provide management development programmes endorsed by the Institute of Leadership & Management.

One recent programme was tailored specifically for the legal sector and was attended by five firms who attended workshops and carried out assignments covering: strategy, business planning, marketing, leading and managing people, developing people and risk management.

The course is designed for individuals with management responsibility for the firm (including practice managers and partners of the firm) and is a holistic approach, teaching law firms how to manage themselves effectively in a competitive market place.

Wendy Peffers from Jonathon Stokes Solicitors is attending the current programme and now feels much more confident in the Practice Manager role, "As I work for a sole practitioner in a new business it is my role to deal with all the administration of the company and I can now do that, confident that I am helping the company to move forward."

As a result of the programme firms will be able to implement a clear framework in areas such as staff development and business planning. This in turn will help them to link people and training to their business objectives and assist them to work towards the Investors in People Standard.

Julie Bruce from the Endeavour Partnership also attended and said "As a partner recently assigned managerial responsibilities, my attendance on the Legal and Professional Practice Management programme provided me with an invaluable overview of the core areas of management and development of a law firm. The course continues to provide a useful reference resource for me."

Assessment North East is planning to repeat the programme for the legal sector in October and similar management development programmes are available for other sectors.

**For more information about the ILM programmes facilitated by Assessment North East contact Gill Brown at [gillb@aneltd.co.uk](mailto:gillb@aneltd.co.uk)**

**Assessment North East also supports legal practices to achieve Lexcel accreditation, contact Briana Edgcumbe at Assessment North East for further information at [brianae@aneltd.co.uk](mailto:brianae@aneltd.co.uk)**

Please email: [ChristineM@aneltd.co.uk](mailto:ChristineM@aneltd.co.uk) if you or a colleague would like an electronic copy of this newsletter

for expert advice call 0191 516 6464

Assessment North East Ltd  
Business & Innovation Centre  
Sunderland Enterprise Park  
Sunderland SR5 2TA  
t 0191 516 6464  
f 0191 516 6470  
e [info@aneltd.co.uk](mailto:info@aneltd.co.uk)  
w [www.aneltd.co.uk](http://www.aneltd.co.uk)

Next issue February 2008



ILM is a trade mark of the City and Guilds of London Institute and is used under licence