

Why all employers must actively support the National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure

Mark Sesnan, managing director at GLL (Greenwich Leisure Limited), is the National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure's guest columnist this month.

As an industry (and I have to confess here that I am only qualified to talk about sport, health, fitness and associated activities) we have not served ourselves very well when it comes to professionalisation. We have allowed our approach to training to become fragmented and frankly (to many, including me) incomprehensible. There are seemingly at least two qualifications and awarding bodies for everything and there is always a constant bicker in the background.

I have to (reluctantly) admit that I have been putting up with this for the last 30 years hoping that one day somebody would see some sense and sort it all out. Of course this never happened and, worse, all semblance of a formal qualifications structure that did exist has now all but disappeared (at least in the past there was only one way of qualifying to be a baths manager and if you were not qualified you did not get the job!). Worse still is that very few of the young people in our industry actively engage in joining a professional institute or value the benefit of joining. That of course begs the question which institute should they join but you can guess that I lost interest in that debate many years ago.

So, is it all doom, gloom and despondency? Of course not. Our industry is probably in the best position it has been in my lifetime. You name it, it is happening: Olympics and Paralympics here on our doorstep, copious medals in Beijing, NHS now funding exercise (in places), world cup bids, the Ashes victory and free swimming. Sport is thriving, exercise is high on the agenda and we are even riding above the recession. And just to prove miracles can happen, ISRM and ISPAL are even working together to create a chartered institute for sport!

So what has all this got to do with the National Skills Academy? Well, everything actually. When I chaired the employer's board that submitted the successful bid for government funding of the Skills Academy, we had two simple objectives: to have a single qualifications structure and to properly professionalise our industry. The Skills Academy won the funding and has now launched on this mission. We (the employers and employees) need to give it our full support. We have two to three years to sort it all out and to make the Skills Academy self-sustainable. The vision is for all employees to carry a skills passport (a bit like REPs) that records their qualification level (within the single simple structure) and monitors their CPD (Continual Professional Development). This will be supported by a network of accredited quality training providers – in both the public and private sector – and web-based learning tools. This is all achievable, all makes sense and will only falter if self-interest interferes.

So who needs to do what? SkillsActive needs to define the single qualifications structure and refuse to accredit anything outside this. The Skills Academy needs to market the passport and sort out the training provider network, only accrediting quality providers who sign up to the single qualifications structure. Employees need to learn to use the passport and to take full responsibility for maintenance of their base qualifications and CPD. Employers need to agree to make holding and maintaining the passport compulsory and to not invite non-holders even to interview. The professional institutes need to deliver the 'chartered manager for sport' status, amalgamate, become its guardian and reinvent the new institute as the single holder of professional standards for our industry.

Easy, innit!



Mark Sesnan

“There are three main principles that underpin everything we do: clarity of the offer within a confused marketplace; innovation in matching employer needs and preferred style of delivery with learning provision; and quality in ensuring only the best training in the sector is offered under the Skills Academy brand”

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