Gold Star Service Excellence Accreditation Scheme

A word from the Minister

A healthy and vibrant SME business community is vital if we are to grow the private sector, rebalance the economy and create new jobs. Northern Ireland, as a relatively small regional economy on the periphery of Europe, faces significant economic challenges.

The capability of our SME community to compete in Europe and further afield is essential if our private sector is to grow and prosper.

The ‘Gold Star’ Service Excellence Accreditation scheme implemented by the Centre for Competitiveness, working with NI Chamber of Commerce and The Consumer Council, is a significant milestone in the area of business support. The pilot programme of six companies has been particularly successful with the participants all reporting tangible and real business impact.

I welcome the opportunity to launch the Gold Star Accreditation Scheme, which will help small and medium businesses develop the world-class levels of customer service that will help them to compete effectively on the global business stage.

Arlene Foster
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
I would define service excellence as “having the ability to engage customers in a personal and professional way so as to create a positive customer experience. It is effective relationships that makes and inspires customers to take action.”

The Gold Star Service Excellence is designed to bring professional and effective international customer service practices into common use by Northern Ireland businesses. The aim is to provide SME’s with an effective improvement means to help them deliver services at home and abroad by putting customers and customer support systems at the core of what they do. The benefits from service excellence are that it delights customers, drives business growth, develops the skills of employees, puts pride into their work and demonstrates the company’s achievements through externally validated accreditation. Successful SME’s will also be profiled on a specially designed “Gold Star Service Excellence” web site connecting their company to external customers seeking excellent service providers for their needs. I heartily encourage SME’s to apply these principles and prosper.

Bob Barbour
Director & CEO
Centre for Competitiveness

Gold Star” Service Excellence Accreditation Scheme

Endorsement by Ulster Bank

Ulster Bank is very pleased to support the launch of the Customer Gold Star Accreditation scheme. Its ethos is very similar to our own Helpful Banking programme with its focus on the customer, and with the performance of participating organisations being independently assessed. We regard the programme as a credible framework for building a better business and we congratulate the Centre for Competitiveness for their ingenuity in designing it and for their drive in delivering it.

Richard Donnan
Chief Executive Retail Markets
Ulster Bank
“Northern Ireland businesses are competing in a global economy and as such need to set themselves apart from the competition. Ensuring your company delivers world-class customer service can be a good starting point and enhances the potential for businesses of all sizes to grow. The Northern Ireland Chamber was pleased to be involved in developing the Gold Star Service Excellence scheme and congratulates the Centre of Competitiveness for introducing an initiative which could put the customer at the heart of organisations across Northern Ireland.”

Ann McGregor
Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce

The Consumer Council's mission is to make the consumer voice heard and make it count. As such, we know how highly Northern Ireland consumers value good customer care; ranking it above any other factor in deciding where to take their business. We therefore commend the Centre for Competitiveness for establishing this initiative and we were delighted to work with them to identify the essential aspects of customer service excellence.

Antoinette McKeown, Chief Executive
The Consumer Council
“Gold Star” Service Excellence Accreditation Scheme

Building Competitive Advantage:

The “Gold Star” Service Excellence Accreditation Scheme has been developed to increase the competitiveness of the participating organisations by creating real competitive advantage.

The scheme is based on research into International approaches to building world class service excellence and has been developed by Centre for Competitiveness in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce (NICC), is endorsed by The Consumer Council and is supported by Ulster Bank.

The “Gold Star” Accreditation – Why would you want it?

Participation in the scheme will deliver real & tangible benefits: -

- You really have to focus on your customer, which adds to the bottom line, making your organisation more profitable
- Builds your brand & reputation
- Makes your staff more satisfied in their work
- Separates you from your competition
- Makes suppliers want to work with you
- Community respects, supports and values you and your business

Simply put: it “Builds a Better Business”

The “Gold Star” Accreditation – How does it work?

- Complete an assessment with a Gold Star Service Excellence ‘Approved Advisor’
- You answer 42 questions about your customer service policy, processes and measurements
- You reflect on your business, giving honest answers
- Your Advisor brings insight and understanding
- Together you identify the areas of strength & under performance
- Agree an action plan to move the under performing areas to a minimum standard. You receive: -
  - Half day assessment support
  - Half day action planning support
  - Specialist consultancy assistance:
    - 2 x half-day support sessions
    - 4 x 1 hour mentoring sessions
- When you are ready to go for the Gold Star accreditation, an evaluation of your progress is made by an appointed ‘Validator’
- If the minimum standard of performance is achieved then you are accredited as “Gold Star” Service Excellence
Use the scheme to promote your business:

- Frame your certificate and display in your premises
- Logo can be printed on all stationary
- Convert logo to a badge for staff uniforms
- Use on all marketing materials
- Use it to win new customers
- Use it to improve your supply chain management
- Celebrate it with your customers

There will be a Gold Star Service Excellence web site with full details of all the Gold Star companies, and related information, for access by customers.

The “Gold Star” Accreditation – How much does it cost?

Flat fee depending on company size: -

- Less than 10 employees: £1650 + vat [€1950]
- From 10 to 250 employees: £2000+ vat [€2400]
- Over 250 employees: Price by Agreement

Large(r) companies can work by unit or by location if they choose:
- Multiple units’ costs will be discounted
- Multiple locations costs will be discounted

Gold Star Service Excellence - Key Steps

**PROCESS**

1. Assessment
2. Close the Gap
3. Improve
4. Accreditation

- Half Day
- Half Day
- 2 x Half Days
- 4 x 1 hr Coaching
- Half Day Prep
- Half Day Audit

**TIME SCALE 3.5 DAYS**

Around 2 weeks
Up to 6 weeks
Around 2 weeks

For further information please contact Centre for Competitiveness on:
(028) 9073 7950 or compete@cforc.org
Company Background

The Clandeboye Lodge is a full service, 4 star country house hotel incorporating:

- 43 contemporary guest rooms
- Clanbrasserie for casual dining
- Events complex with 5 suites for up to 550 guests
- Extensive landscaped gardens

The hotels’ current core markets are corporate & leisure stays, weddings and social & club events. It is difficult to quantify the total amount of customer interactions due to the high frequency during either a residential or non-residential visit. For the year ending 30 June 2011, the hotel welcomed 15,000 residents with associated employee inter-actions and guest experience points, and served in excess 85,000 breakfasts, lunches and dinners (excl. individual orders for hot drinks and beverages). Even at a modest multiplier of say 10 guest/employee interactions per visit that amounts to 1,000,000 service excellence opportunities or 2,739 daily interactions.

A management team of 7 (supported by a F/T equivalent of 48 employees) are responsible to provide leadership, review and update policies and manage manpower and financial resources to deliver corporate KPI's. The EFQM Business Excellence model is applied to assess the hotels’ strengths and areas for improvement against strategic goals and prioritisation of improvement plans to achieve sustainable growth and enhanced performance.

For the year ending 30 June 2011, the hotel increased revenues by 10.84% compared to the previous year, with operating profits up by 6.0%
**Why we committed to the “Gold Star Role Model” Service Excellence scheme**

As a key driver of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) business excellence model, ongoing assessment of the hotel’s customer focus, service delivery and guest satisfaction feedback supports the Clandeboye Lodge’s corporate strategy to deliver sustained EBITDA growth as a result of learning from customers and employees, increasing productivity without affecting service delivery and where possible, reducing non customer facing overheads.

Gold Star is aligned with EFQM, and is the ideal European benchmark for customer service excellence. Focussing on 42 individual aspects, it stimulates fresh thinking and innovation around customer service that deliver real business improvements.

**Reaction and Impact**

By creating a culture of customer focus and employee empowerment, as well as developing mutually beneficial partnerships with the hotels’ stakeholders,

the hotels’ measurable service excellence and customer satisfaction targets have been met and/or exceeded.

Compared with the hotels’ competitive set, or benchmark group, the Clandeboye Lodge ranks #1 on Tripadvisor’s Popularity Index with a 93% excellent/very good rating.

Gold Star provides an external validation of our internal processes and performance. To rank #1 on TripAdviser’s Popularity Index is validated by being accredited Gold Star Role Model for customer service excellence, which requires a minimum of 3-years positive trends in a range of results.

The impact is measurable in the form of repeat custom, the ability to charge premium instead of discounted prices by creating a reputation for service excellence, and ultimately, for employees job satisfaction and security in a challenging economic climate and for shareholders, increased profitability and return on investment.
**Expected Medium & Long Term Business Benefits**

- Increasing employee satisfaction and empowerment to achieve future corporate targets
- Further improving service delivery productivity
- Growing market share through exceeding customer expectations
- Delivering financial KPI’s which exceed NI hotel industry averages. (Ratio to Total Sales – Clandeboye Lodge 23.1% EBITDA per available room versus NI average of 16.8% - source ASM Belfast NI Hotel Industry Review and Prospects 2011)
- Increased support from stakeholders, including but not limited to repeat customers, employees, trade partners and banks
Company Name: Airporter
Address: 1 Bay Road, Culmore Road
City Derry/Londonderry  Post Code BT48 7SH  Tel 02871 269996
Contact Name Jennifer McKeever  Position Director
e-mail jennifer.mckeever@airporter.co.uk Tel as above

Company Background

Airporter is a family run transport company based in Derry/Londonderry providing a direct scheduled coach service connecting the North West with the 2 Belfast Airports. The business was established in 1996 and now carries 80,000 passengers a year and employs 20 people. Airporter has developed a reputation for being an industry leader in innovation and quality of service. In 2009 Airporter was the first coach company in Northern Ireland to introduce free Wifi on board the whole fleet and in 2010 introduced the first online reservation system for coach travel in Northern Ireland.

Why we committed to the “Gold Star” Service Excellence Pilot

We were looking for a system to ensure consistent delivery of service and best practice across the whole organization, a way of defining everyone’s responsibilities with regards to how we treat our customers, and ultimately, a way of promoting our customer service standards to attract more passengers.
**Reaction and Impact**

The reaction from staff was excellent, and the results from the first audit were startling: we could clearly see that while the management team were involved with activities which clearly addressed Customer Service excellence, we weren’t sharing nearly enough with the staff so we had many areas of what Adrian called “divergence”. We also found that while there was clearly an ethos of customer service, we had a great deal to do to clearly define what was expected by staff, management and customer. We began with customer service training (including Customer Service NVQ’s for 13 staff members) and then began to put in place tangible guidelines including a Customer Service Charter, a staff handbook and set up monthly team meetings. While we were delighted to have successfully achieved our accreditation, we are even more pleased with the process and the results at the end of it.

**Expected Medium & Long Term Business Benefits**

- A more empowered staff who are better trained to deliver excellent service and to promote the company and our values.
- A better communication channel with our customers to ensure we are developing in a way that is responsive to their needs.
- A more comprehensive system which captures complements, complaints and comments and tracks the progress of improvements.
- A more defined brand for Airporter, which encourages our customers to leave their cars at home and use the Airporter.
- A more structured approach to business planning which will make expansion more ambitious, more profitable and more organized.
- A better management system including new KPI’s and definition of success.
- Ultimately, a more streamlined and profitable company making Airporter a role model for small businesses in transport and beyond.

**Intention to Work Toward “Gold Star” Role Model**  Yes!!!!!
“Gold Star” Service Excellence – Mini Case Study #3

Company Name: Baker Tilly Mooney Moore  
Address: 17 Clarendon Road, Clarendon Dock

City Belfast  Post Code BT1 3BG  Tel 028 90323466  
Contact Name Damien Diamond  Position Partner  
e-mail damiendiamond@mooneymoore.co.uk  Tel 028 90 323466

Company Background

Baker Tilly Mooney Moore provides business advisory and accountancy services to clients in the private, public and voluntary sectors. Services provided include; Audit & Assurance, Taxation, Computer Consultancy, Business Services, Corporate Finance, Forensic Services, Corporate Recovery, Business Planning, HR Management Consultancy and Marketing. In 2000 the firm was selected to become the member firm of Baker Tilly International in Northern Ireland. With 145 firms in 110 countries Baker Tilly International is the eighth largest accountancy and business advisory firm in the world. To further serve the needs of our clients the firm created an all-island practice with the Republic of Ireland’s member firm, Baker Tilly Ryan Glennon, in 2007. The five partner firm now employs approximately 35 staff and is based in Clarendon Dock in Belfast.

Why we committed to the “Gold Star” Service Excellence Pilot

- We are committed to customer service to differentiate ourselves in a competitive market place, retain clients and increase staff satisfaction.
- We applied to the Gold Star Programme to give us the opportunity to benchmark ourselves against best practice, receive an external analysis of our practices and develop action plans for improvement that are in line with best practice.
- Achieving the Gold Star Standard would display our commitment to customer service to the wider world.
Reaction and Impact

We were delighted to be selected for the pilot programme and have been extremely impressed with the process and how it has been carried out. It has served as a catalyst for positive change within our firm. It has refocused attention on customer service and initiatives that we have put in place include:

Client Care team established – a team of staff members has been set up to establish a set of standards and ensure these are implemented consistently throughout the firm. These standards are focused on procedures that will deliver excellent customer service.
The group also generates ideas and new approaches to be carried out throughout the firm.

Internal Newsletter - Issued by e-mail quarterly to ensure consistent and regular communication with all staff.

Yearly Staff Event - an opportunity to update all staff on the firm and to welcome new staff.

Awards – the firm won the Customer Service Excellence Award for the Professional Service Sector at the Belfast Business Awards.

Taking part in this process has given us an independent, external appraisal of our processes. It has provided a structured, practical method of self-assessment and a realistic yet ambitious action plan to address areas for potential improvement and recognise areas of strength.

Expected Medium & Long Term Business Benefits

As a provider of professional services, the importance of motivated, committed and professionally trained staff is vital to the success of our organisation. The firm recognises that providing excellent customer service is a process of continuous improvement, which will ultimately result in tangible business benefits through client retention and referral work.

The firm has put in place work practices aimed at improving its business, focusing attention on customer service, developing and supporting its people, attracting and retaining clients and offering a wide range of services tailored to individual client’s needs at a competitive price.
| Intention to Work Toward “Gold Star” Role Model | Yes |
“Gold Star” Service Excellence – Mini Case Study #4

Company Name: Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce
Address: 22 Great Victoria Street

City: Belfast        Post Code: BT2 7BJ        Tel: 028 9024 4113
Contact Name: Sandra Scannell       Position: Operations & Programmes Director
e-mail: sandra.scannell@northernirelandchamber.com       Tel: As above

Company Background

Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce (NICC) is the largest chamber in Northern Ireland and one of the fastest growing in the British Chambers of Commerce network. Formed in 1783, we have represented the interests of business and commerce across Northern Ireland for over 227 years. We now have a large and active membership of almost 1,000 businesses, and a reach of over 10,000, from the smallest SME and sole trader to the largest corporations, PLCs and institutions.

Why we committed to the “Gold Star” Service Excellence Pilot

As a membership organisation, providing an effective, efficient service to our membership is of the utmost importance. Whilst we have been good at developing relationships with our members in the past, we did not have a joined up team approach to customer service.

Having been involved in the development of the “Gold Star” Service Excellence award with the Centre for Competitiveness and NI Consumer Council we recognised that achieving the award ourselves would be highly beneficial to our business.

Working towards the accreditation enabled us to focus on delivering for the customer and offered the opportunity to improve on what we do well and address those elements that required further development.
Reaction and Impact

The ‘Gold Star’ Service Excellence Award has firmly placed the customer at the heart of our business. The focus it has given us has led to the introduction of a new customer service charter and member retention scheme.

We have brought the whole team on board to ensure our customers receive the best level of service no matter who they are dealing with. All staff have received training which, combined with the customer service charter and its associated procedures, guarantees consistency of service.

The member retention scheme has had a significant impact on how we do business, giving our member companies the opportunity to have their voice heard and shape the Chamber offering. The scheme offers member companies a point of contact that can outline the benefits of membership and provide information on relevant upcoming events or policy issues that would be of interest.

We are seeing the results already as our member interactions increase and our members companies become more engaged. Our events continue to be well attended and we have listened to our members to ensure there is something for everyone.

There is no doubt the increased focus on our customers has been a successful strategy which the entire team have bought into.

Expected Medium & Long Term Business Benefits

- Increased engagement with member companies
- Higher retention levels across membership
- Improved reputation
- Increased business
- More member utilisation of Chamber services

Intention to Work Toward “Gold Star” Role Model
Possibly next year, 2012.
“Gold Star” Service Excellence – Mini Case Study #5

Company Name: SLA Mobile
Address: innovation Centre, Queens Road
City Belfast Post Code BT3 9DT Tel 02890 736780
Contact Name Maeve Gorman Position HR/Contracts Manager
e-mail maeve@sla-mobile.com Tel 02890 736784

Company Background

Founded in 2003, SLA Mobile is a privately owned technology business that is focussed on delivering Products, Services and Solutions for the Mobile Internet. With a head office in Belfast, centre of excellence in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, teams are currently engaged in delivering projects in locations such as Australia, New Zealand, Qatar, Malaysia, and Indonesia, as well as a number of locations in Europe.

SLA Mobile has won a number of awards for growth, including The Sunday Times Tech Track, Deloitte Fast 50 & 500 (2009: 3rd Ireland, 9th UK, 29th Europe) as well as winning a prestigious Red Herring Europe award in 2009.

The business has some of the World’s leading mobile and media brands as customers, including Vodafone (and a large number of its Operating Companies (OpCo’s), and Fox.

Why we committed to the “Gold Star” Service Excellence Pilot

We committed to the “Gold Star” Service Excellence pilot to enhance our reputation and to validate our customer service systems.

As it was developed by the centre for competitiveness, the consumer council and NI Chamber of commerce over a year, we knew it would be an instantly recognisable accreditation.
Reaction and Impact

We had a good customer service ethos but needed to formalise our processes. The reaction from everyone was very positive and we worked in collaboration to come up with our company charters.

Since we have done the scheme we are communicating better throughout the company, monitoring and capturing key information and we are generally working better as a team.

Expected Medium & Long Term Business Benefits

The benefits thus far have been very positive and I expect that in the medium and long term we will benefit from an enhanced reputation, improved teamwork, which will translate into our bottom line.

All these benefits reinforce the positive impact that focussing on your customers can have.

Intention to Work Toward “Gold Star” Role Model

Yes
EFQM Hall of Fame - EFQM Gold Star Customer Service Excellence

Gold Star Role Model

2012 Clandeboye Lodge hotel
2012 Radisson Blu hotel

Gold Star

2011 Radisson Blu hotel
2012 Airporter
2012 Institute of Directors
2012 NI Chamber of Commerce
2012 Bake Tilly Mooney Moore
2012 SLA Mobile
2012 Boomer Industries
2012 Neal Lucas Recruitment
2012 Legal Island Training
2012 Cafe Piazza
2012 Keady Farm View B&B
2012 Drenagh Estate
2012 Faughanvale Stables
2012 Foyle Hove
**Centre for Competitiveness**

The Centre for Competitiveness is a not for profit, independent, membership organisation. It supports organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors build their competitive advantage through Innovation, Quality Excellence, Productivity Growth and Collaborative Networks, enabling them to compete in global markets and deliver world-class services.

Companies engage with the Centre for competitiveness in one, several or all of these four activities, depending on their needs and interests.

**Benchmark** – choose from a range of European benchmarks to drive growth.

**Improve** – a wide range of International Best Practice tools and techniques to drive Continuous Improvement and Competitive Advantage.

**Recognise** – It’s not enough just being excellent at what you do, you need to tell others so that you win new business. Choose from a range of recognition schemes.

**Share** – Learn, share and collaborate through a range of International and European networks, Irish clusters and Best Practice Clubs to drive your innovation.

**International Networks and Partners**

![EFQM](image)

![IMProve](image)

![pdma](image)

![GFCC](image)

![World Council on Competitiveness](image)
Opportunities for Partners and Resellers

The Gold Star Service Excellence Accreditation Scheme was designed and developed with a Partnership Model very much in mind. The Centre for Competitiveness works with a wide range of other organisations in the design and delivery of its services, and has been using the collaborative approach successfully for many years. The Gold Star Service Excellence Accreditation Scheme is no different.

There are opportunities for different types of organisation to work with the Centre, for example:

**Local Councils** - Gold Star is particularly suited for local councils use. It can be run as a stand-alone programme, promoted and part-funded by councils, or integrated as part of another programme, or as part of a wide programme of initiatives.

**Chambers of Commerce** - Gold Star can be used as part of chamber’s work with their members, helping them to grow through richer quality service. Chambers are always looking for ways to add value to their membership offerings whilst at the same time increasing the competitiveness of their city, town or region.

**City and Town Centre Management** - City centre or town centre management often work closely with their local chamber, and are always seeking ways to delight and satisfy the customers that visit their city or town. Gold Star can be a useful tool to link local business with shoppers to increase sales and business growth whilst at the same time improving the shopping experience for the customers in their area, thus improving their competitiveness over other cities or towns.

**Membership Organisations** - The perfect value added member benefit, helping their members stand out from the rest, and earning revenue at the same time.

**Consultants and Consulting Organisations** - There are business opportunities for consultants to work on the delivery side of the Gold Star scheme generating additional revenue through adding to their portfolio of products/services. The Centre for Competitiveness will manage the accreditation.

We have a range of business models to match these opportunities, and welcome enquiries. Please contact the Centre for Competitiveness on (028) 9073 7950 or compete@cforc.org