

# Flybe Exeter

Europe's largest regional airline is revolutionising the way the industry trains its staff in a groundbreaking partnership with Exeter College.

Exeter-based Flybe wants to end the requirement that cabin crew moving from one airline to another have to be retrained from scratch every time they change jobs, a situation that not only wastes airlines' time and money but is also demoralising for the crew themselves.

"If you're a Flight Attendant and go from, say, Virgin to Flybe to British Airways, there's no formal way of recognising your career experience, so you get retrained and retrained again everywhere you go," says Hayley Lyon, Flybe's Training Development Manager. "If there was an industrywide-recognised qualification, airlines would just need to give new staff a two-day course to cover the topics that were specific to their own airline. So this is why we want to give our staff a transferable qualification they can take with them anywhere."

## Flybe's approach is to incorporate its existing training programme into an NVQ

Flybe's initiative, likely to prove popular with cabin crew throughout the industry, is being closely watched by other airlines and some are already taking tentative steps towards offering their own staff the chance to gain the same or a similar NVQ qualification.

"We're glad they're following our example," says Hayley. "If we were the only airline that offered a qualification it would be great for us, but not very useful if it wasn't recognised further afield."

Flybe's approach is to incorporate its existing training programme into an NVQ – delivered and assessed by Exeter College on the airline's premises.

"We can't change the content of the training we deliver because this is a regulated industry, so we looked at the training and mapped it to an NVQ," says Hayley. "We've been training people for 20 years, but not within any academic framework or through delivering formal academic qualifications.

"We began looking for an academic partner because we didn't want to become a training provider ourselves and wanted to use the experience and facilities of someone else. We invited 35 colleges to a presentation and chose Exeter College – not because they happened to be on our doorstep but because they were by far the most appropriate and complemented our vision.

"The idea was for someone to come from the college and work full-time from our office. We told her what we wanted and she spoke to the college and told us what our options were."

That close co-operation has enabled Flybe to create engineering apprenticeships that can offer school-leavers a short cut to a career and give them four more years of earning a living while they learn.

"We used to have people who went through the whole education system to university and then came to us when they were 20 or 21 and had to start all over again. All their formal education didn't make them any more immediately employable to an airline. Thanks to Exeter College, a school leaver can now join us, do a four-year apprenticeship, and be a fully-qualified and employable engineer by the time he or she is 21!"

The new Flybe apprenticeships involve two years' full-time study at Exeter College then two years of learning on the job at Flybe.

"We go to school events together and Exeter College manage any applications for the engineering apprenticeship. We even interview people jointly with them. We didn't want to set up everything ourselves. We want to do what we do best and let the college

do what they do best. Then we meet in the middle. We've got used to each other and are linking directly with our counterparts on each site. Everyone is now working together. We're sharing practices with everyone who wants to know."

## "We want to give our staff a transferable qualification they can take with them anywhere"

Apart from the time and money saved in not having to retrain cabin crew, and the fast-tracking that the apprenticeships offer school leavers, the training Exeter College provides has other benefits for Flybe.

"Our staff feel invested in," explains Hayley. "They now feel more involved because we've given them an opportunity to gain a formal, transferable qualification. We're having a lot more people interested in training for qualifications, allowing them to plan a clear career path with us."

Flybe has, to date, put approximately 200 people through training with the college – including cabin crew, engineers and call centre staff.

"We wouldn't have been able to do anything like this without the partnership," adds Hayley.

Flybe and Exeter College's partnership will culminate next year in the opening of a world-class Training Academy at Exeter International Airport.

