

# CASE STUDY



## Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC)

*“By working within the framework provided by Investors in People we have been able to achieve consistency, efficiency and run successful events. Occupancy at EICC is increasing and, in line with our target, we have generated over £149.5 million for the local economy.”*

**Geoff Fenlon, Business Excellence Director**



### BACKGROUND

|                  |                                                         |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Size:</b>     | 61 employees                                            |
| <b>Sector:</b>   | Conferences and Events                                  |
| <b>Location:</b> | Edinburgh                                               |
| <b>Status:</b>   | First achieved Investors in People recognition in 1997; |

### THE ORGANISATION

Opened in 1995, the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) was set up by the local authorities to generate additional economic impact for Edinburgh and the surrounding area by drawing in business tourists. The intention was that these tourists would not only generate new income for hotels but also for other related businesses such as pubs, shops and taxis among others. Since opening, the EICC has staged over 1,500 successful events and has attracted over 600,000 delegates. By 2006 it will be recognised globally with a number of industry accolades - as a “Centre of Service Excellence”, a Five Star Brand and a holder of the “Benchmark of the Service Industry”.

- **Increased its operating profit by over 400 per cent**
- **Generated over £149.5 million for the local economy**
- **EICC is the fifth highest occupied venue and fifth top venue for turning over its space.**

## THE CHALLENGE

"The conference and events industry is all about people - they determine whether we are successful or not," remarks Geoff Fenlon, Business Excellence Director of the EICC. "With long timelines for conference bookings – for example, we have confirmed bookings up to 2013 and tentative ones up to 2020 – our customers have to believe that what they are promised can, and will, be delivered. That can only be achieved through trust in our people." "It made sense for us, therefore, to look for a framework such as Investors in People in order to develop our human resource policies to ensure our business is successful," he says. "The good thing about Investors in People is that it fitted in completely with our business excellence approach. From the outset we used the Excellence Model from quality organisation EFQM to help us set up the company and Investors in People addresses the people management aspect perfectly." "We also needed to develop a culture that would encourage individuals to move from being just another member of the team to ones who would strive to become business-focused and ultimately business leaders."

## THE STRATEGY

"We dedicate time and funds to developing an individual," continues Geoff. "We see this as an investment as it will maximise their contribution to EICC as well as enhance their own personal career development. "We see 360 degree appraisals as key to this process and have continued to fine tune them year on year. The most recent change has been to reduce paperwork and conduct appraisals as a team around a table as well as provide workshops on the subject for team leaders. We have also introduced a psychometric tool to make the appraisals more objective." EICC also encourages Continuous Professional Development (CPD) within the organisation. This can take the form of sponsored courses, such as an MBA, linguistic training or other forms of long-term education. "Getting our people involved and making them feel empowered is also essential – we want them to "own" the event, the issue, the success, the business" says Geoff. "All staff are encouraged to find creative ways to make life easier without compromising quality. We are firm believers that no-one has a monopoly on good ideas and have processes in place that support this while ensuring any output is sensitive to all stakeholder needs." The EICC uses a number of techniques and resources to help people find ways of improving themselves and the business. "We have adopted a unique approach for the industry," says Geoff. "We use the Human Resources / Total Quality Management staff as internal consultants and facilitators so that team members are given help to meet any challenges without actually being provided with the answers. So, by people working with other teams to find solutions, not only do we get a solution but also ownership, learning and commitment." EICC also has other mechanisms to hand ranging from proactive, such as brainstorming, to reactive and preventative. "Our whole approach is one of empowerment – all new people are informed when they join that their role is to exceed expectations," says Geoff. "To do this we have put policies and procedures in place to help them."

## THE RESULTS

Edinburgh was the first congress venue to become an Investor in People back in 1997. "The implementation of the process has been vital," comments Geoff. "In the service industry and in particular in the hospitality industry we are dealing with people. By working within the framework provided by Investors in People we have been able to achieve consistency, efficiency and run successful events." However Geoff is quick to point out that achieving Investors in People is not a rigid procedure: "Processes rather than detailed procedures have been important," he stresses. "These would have to change for just about every event – maybe even during an event." "Investors in People is highly valued within the organisation," he adds. "Such qualitative assessments are of vital importance and we pay close attention to what they say. We have reviewed whether to adopt a more quantitative approach but have decided that our current approach suits our culture of open communications and allows people to fully express themselves." The EICC has achieved dramatic results for the regional economy since it was created and has undoubtedly achieved world-class status. It has also increased its operating profit by over 400 per cent. "Occupancy is increasing and, in line with our target, we have generated over £149.5 million for the local economy," confirms Geoff. "We also compare well with other venues around the world where the EICC is the fifth highest occupied venue and the fifth top venue at turning over its space."