"The best team on the pitch"

What impressed the Barclays Wealth team was the "flexible and commercial" approach when they asked the Institute to devise a professional hallmark for recruits to the bank's new contact centres.

Recent recruits to two new contact centres launched by Barclays Wealth are blazing an important new trail for the bank in servicing high net worth customers – and it's the Institute which has helped to map the route.

When they were planning their Glasgow contact centres – one for international banking, the other for their UK-based investment business – Barclays Wealth contacted the Institute to help them devise a banking qualification that would reinforce their team's knowledge and confidence with clients in an intensely competitive market.

"We were keen to have a professional banking accreditation that demonstrates our commitment to developing our people beyond our already comprehensive internal training," explains Anne Howell-Jones, Head of Client Service, Wealth Operations. "We wanted to give our contact centre staff something they can take with them through their career. Our aim is to have what our Chief Executive, Tom Kalaris, describes as 'the best team on the pitch' and this development opportunity goes some way to supporting this."

"We want to give our contact centre staff something they can take with them through their career."
ANNE HOWELL-JONES

The Barclays Wealth team started talking to the Institute about 18 months ago. "We were really impressed. We were very much welcomed and found the Institute to be very flexible and commercial. They didn't come with all the stuffy trappings. Their attitude was very proactive, accommodating and refreshing."

"We wanted our staff to get an externally recognised accreditation. Working with the Institute has been really inspiring."

Working closely with Barclays Wealth, the Institute devised a pilot programme for contact centre volunteers in what quickly became a "heavily oversubscribed" project. At the end of June, these trailblazers took their Introduction to Financial Management exam to give staff with little previous sector experience a firm understanding of the basics of banking and financial services and products.

Anne Howell-Jones is convinced that the initiative "sets us apart" as an employer and as a Wealth Manager. The client base is "financially sophisticated and with high expectations of a Wealth service" operating relatively complex multi-currency products and accounts. "This qualification can, and will, give the individuals more confidence in dealing with clients on a relatively equal basis. That's important to us. It helps us in a highly competitive market."

Indeed, the pilot is now being assessed for its suitability in other areas.

"What keeps customers loyal during those turbulent times is the strength of their relationship with the bank. This qualification helps our staff to build that trust."

"We see no reason why we can't provide this development opportunity across a whole range of our operational activities," she says. "As we grow the banking proposition in Glasgow, we can see this qualification being broadened to encompass roles outside the contact centre as well."

The Barclays Wealth team also identified one unexpected strength in the Institute's approach – the series of weekly pre-exam revision sessions run by experienced mentors. "It wasn't something we'd thought of until the Institute suggested it," recalls Maxine Gooding, Operational Excellence. "But it's a good example of how proactive and encouraging they've been with us.

"We were keen to keep a high profile within the business so that students feel they're doing something that's really valued. And when the Institute offered those mentor-led revision sessions, the students quickly snapped them up."

As well as the formal mentoring in the six weeks leading up to the exam, students could contact their assigned mentors at any time for support and guidance about points they didn't understand.

Anne Howell-Jones talks of the "really powerful" combination of bank and Institute support: "We wanted our staff to get an externally recognised accreditation – that was important to us. And I think the students seeing the organisation and the Institute working together has been really inspiring."

She believes the qualification is an important competitive differentiator. "It would be strange if it wasn't. In this market, what makes the difference is our culture and our people.

"What keeps customers loyal during those turbulent times is the strength of their relationship with the bank. That does place greater demands on everybody, from the contact centre through to the Private Bankers. It's all about having a trusted relationship with our clients. This qualification helps our staff to build that trust.

"And I would add how easy it was to work with the Institute. They really made it easy. They've been supportive and positive – a good experience that stands us in good stead for the future."

If you want to improve the performance of your business, please speak to the Institute's Customer Relationship Management Team on 0131 473 7784 or e-mail them at crm@charteredbanker.com