

The Sector Skills Council for Science,
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies

semta

Aerospace, Automotive
and Electronics
Sector Skills Agreement

Highlights

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Foreword

Much has been achieved since the first issue of SSA Highlights was published in Spring 2007. In continuing to work across the four nations to support employers, Semta has facilitated key events, bringing together employers and ministers to take action.

In particular last summer's aerospace conference provided the momentum to launch important activities to implement the SSA and we plan to use the conference approach in other sectors. Before the conference employer representatives and Semta directors had a fruitful meeting with key ministers from Gordon Brown's new government. We have also met with new government ministers in Scotland,

Wales and Northern Ireland. Semta addressed the Essential Skills Employer Awareness Conference hosted in Belfast by Amicus the Union and the Engineering Training Council. The conference was opened and supported by Sir Reg Empey, Northern Ireland's Minister for Employment and Learning.

Ongoing activities include further development of the 'Business to Skills' model (see Highlights Issue 1) and engagement in workforce planning. Work is also underway to regroup electronics sector activities across the four nations and to establish an automotive sector strategy group.

Lynn Tomkins, UK Policy Director, Semta

Help with workforce planning



January 2008 sees the first milestones reached in a major Semta-funded project to help companies plan for their workforce needs. Led by the aerospace sector, the Strategic Workforce Planning project seeks to develop a framework which a wide range of companies can use flexibly to identify their recruitment, training and development needs. Simple diagnostics, helpful tools and guidance are to be included in the framework.

The initiative will enable employers to address the SSA priority area of recruitment and manpower planning to help ensure they have the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time. It also aims to provide Semta with accurate, up-to-date information so that it can send a clear and timely demand signal to government and those who plan, fund and provide vocational education and training. This will build on the gap analysis of

the SSA and present a plan of action to close the gap by matching supply to demand.

Companies have collaborated in benchmarking current practice and offering examples of actions that work for them. Their contributions have led to the identification of basic common features required of a workforce planning process. An initial report and 'pilot' framework will be tabled at the Midlands Aerospace Alliance skills group meeting on 17 January, then submitted to the SBAC People Management Board on 29 January. There are plans to test the framework in several regions, refine it as necessary, and encourage its use by a wide audience. Work will then take place to roll out the model to other sectors including automotive, electronics and marine during 2008. Further details will appear in the next issue of Highlights.

Funding deal under development

Negotiations are underway with the Learning and Skills Council to form a sector compact which will secure major funding to implement SSA priorities. Under the three-year deal employers in England will be helped to fund a range of training programmes to boost employee competence, including adult advanced apprenticeships, management and leadership and delivery of level 2 and 3 qualifications for the technical workforce.

An additional outcome is expected to be the accreditation of bespoke company programmes through a model developed by Semta in conjunction with the National Skills Academy for Manufacturing. The compact will include the use of the Business to Skills model, brokerage services, guidance and support to ensure training is tailored to meet specific business needs. It also aims to increase the number of companies adopting the Skills Pledge.

B-IT benefits breakthrough

Thales Air Defence took advantage of a three-month break in production at one of its Belfast sites to embed lean principles for improved productivity. All 26 employees worked with ETCNI to achieve the Level 2 Business-Improvement Techniques (B-IT) NVQ – the first in Northern Ireland to do so.

Site manager, Billy Robinson, explains: “We wanted to maximise the lean layout of our production lines by helping operators understand why we had designed things that way and become involved in continuous improvement. From an operational standpoint it has given employees leverage to get things done in their own area. The 5C audit identified things which were quite easy to improve, which we immediately addressed, and formed the basis of an operating plan for longer-term action. Now we have improvement plans prioritised in terms of what will give us the best gains, and teams established to implement them.”

Following this success, the company is to embark on a year-long programme at its Castlereagh site where upto 100 direct and support staff working in cross-functional teams will do the B-IT NVQ. “Doing B-IT whilst maintaining the production schedule is going to be a challenge,” Billy admits. “We’re setting up a dedicated training room where people can leave their material undisturbed whilst they’re working on their NVQ.”

Group Lotus plc and automotive supplier, Visteon, are among the first companies to be accredited by The National Skills Academy for

Manufacturing (NSA-M) to deliver B-IT NVQs through their own staff. Nine team leaders at Visteon’s Liverpool site gained the Level 3 NVQ after NSA-M and Thames Gateway College intervened to help the company align its high-quality training to the NVQ requirements. A key employee completed training to become a qualified NVQ assessor, allowing the college to award NVQs to candidates who he assesses as competent. Now more Visteon employees and suppliers are to benefit. Seventeen Lotus employees in Norfolk gained the Level 2 B-IT NVQ through a similar partnership with NSA-M and Norwich City College, funded through Train to Gain. They are spearheading a continuous improvement drive that targets 300 Level 2 certificates by July 2008.



Skills transfer route to ease aircraft engineer shortfall

The growing shortage of licensed engineers working in the aerospace maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) sector is set to reduce significantly, as Semta and its partners carry out their proposed action plan.

UK MRO activity for civil aircraft has continued to grow since the year 2000, yet revenue-generating opportunities estimated at £14bn over the next five years are being threatened by a shortfall of 10,000 aircraft engineers licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

Against this 10,000 military personnel leave the services each year with high-level MRO skills and the potential to fill vacancies, but fail to have their skills recognised in Civvy Street. Semta has brought together aerospace employers, trade associations, representatives from civil aviation, the armed forces, higher education and awarding body, EAL, to effect

an armed forces/civilian skills transfer solution and support the development of existing civilian employees in achieving their license.

CAA license criteria are being mapped against existing NVQs and significant steps are being

made in reaching agreement between all partners. Semta hopes to develop a specialist NVQ/VRQ route which will serve both to improve the skills of RAF, REME and civilian MRO engineers and to meet CAA licensing requirements.



Panasonic puts people first

Panasonic
ideas for life



Steve Allen, Training Manager at Panasonic Communications Company (UK) based in Newport, South Wales, and an early member of the electronics SSG, is committed to ensuring that all employees have the skills they need for the job. "We've started to put competency assessment

systems in place for both current and new employees, so we don't assume people know all they need to know. People follow a schedule of on-the-job training and development which includes academic and vocational qualifications," he says. "It's a systematic approach to ensure that managers have a training and development regime for their staff."

The company provides the opportunity for all to develop the core business skills of communication, numeracy and IT literacy. "The issues are satisfying the training needs of an increasing immigrant base and

an older workforce as well as making up the shortfall in the compulsory basic education system," says Steve. That means providing communication skills training for non English-speaking workers, with funding from the Welsh National Assembly, and running a drop-in facility for those who want to brush up their literacy and numeracy skills. A training suite also offers a range of IT training programmes at Level 2 and beyond.

Leadership and management – an SSA priority - is a main focus area for the business. Panasonic has established its own programmes similar to ILM courses and sponsors a management development programme at corporate level. The Newport site is putting together a leadership and management development programme to run as a precursor to this. "We're trying to manage the development of people in a more structured manner and have introduced a 'Talent for Tomorrow' programme," Steve explains. "It's open to anyone, but people have to apply and justify how they think they've got what it takes to be a senior leader. For those who don't get selected there's a system in place for ensuring any developmental needs are met so they can re-apply. It's a good device for assessing training and development needs generally."

Small but highly-trained

CLYDE SPACE
solutions for a new age in space

A go-ahead company in Scotland is demonstrating how training is vital to small businesses and setting an example for SMEs to follow. Clyde Space is a spacecraft hardware design and manufacturing company based in Glasgow, specialising in small-satellite subsystems including solar panels, batteries and power management systems. Established two years ago and a pioneer in its field, the company's workforce has grown from three to ten people, 70% of whom have at least one university degree in their field.

Managing Director, Craig Clark, recognises the importance of training staff to the highest standards to stay at the cutting edge. "We're innovative in our approach and want to make sure we're using the latest techniques so we have to be a bit smarter than everyone else in this market. Because there is very little space

industry in Scotland, it's difficult to find staff trained to the levels we require. Therefore, we've sent our assembly technician on a specialist space systems assembly course. In other areas we're having to look to the USA for affordable, tailored training courses."

The company benefits from strong links with academia. "It's important to keep moving on and innovating," says Craig. "We're sponsoring an Eng D at the Institute for System-level Integration in Livingston who takes on development projects for the company and soon we're starting a Knowledge Transfer Project with Strathclyde University."

Looking to future recruitment needs, Craig has supported Semta's careers promotion activities. "I gave a talk to careers advisers on

what the company does and how it's possible to get into this industry and generate work in the local area from it," he says. "The reason we did it is that it's important we get more people into engineering."



Find out more

For further information, please visit Semta's website: www.semta.org.uk

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