

A sense of direction

Ahead of the MACH exhibition this month (21-25 April, NEC, Birmingham), Andrew Allcock interviewed Graham Dewhurst, director general of the event's organiser, MTA, about his vision for the Association



Director general Graham Dewhurst, right, with MTA president Geoff Lloyd

MACH exhibition organiser the Manufacturing Technologies Association appointed Graham Dewhurst as its director general last year. He has plans to boost the breadth of the Association membership and also deliver more value to members.

An accountant by profession, Mr Dewhurst's career has always seen him involved in the industrial arena. Most significantly, he spent 19 years at Renold plc, previous owner of Holroyd, a machine tool maker and compressor screw manufacturer, and grinding machine maker Jones & Shipman. Indeed, he ran Renold's machine tool business from 2001 through to 2007. His connection with the MTA started in 2004 when he began a three year appointment as treasurer.

"Having been involved with the MTA as a member, I believe I understand what it is that members need and want. I have

knowledge of the industry and the ability to speak with government, with civil servants and with those from other industries," says the director general.

"I have strong export knowledge because about 90 per cent of Holroyd and Jones & Shipman production went overseas. And more than that, the exports were to India, China, Russia and the USA – now seen as growth markets."

VISION THING

So what is his vision for the Association moving forward? "We intend to change the way we approach our membership. We are up to 252 members and are now targeting member retention through better engagement and a much more advanced member visit programme to find out what it is that they are looking for from the MTA for their businesses."

Mr Dewhurst refers to the numbers of services the Association now offers to its

members. "There are 42 different services. Some members take up eight, 10, 15, while others take up just two or three. We don't want to be a 'one size fits all' organisation; we want to offer what any particular member wants.

"We have a very disparate membership; we have £multi-million turnover members like Yamazaki Mazak and Renishaw, right down to owner-manager companies with £1 million turnovers or less. Clearly, some companies will be exporters while others will be focused on the domestic market."

Some services will be reduced or consolidated, says the director general, while delivery will be improved. "We are committed to raising the bar in the performance of all our people." Indeed, the MTA has signed the government's Skills Pledge, but once again this drive for 'continuous improvement' draws on Mr Dewhurst's previous career in industry.

The training focus is also directed at member companies and is the basis of new member services and initiatives. "At Renold we always had an apprentice training school and graduate development programme. And while it was a reasonably large business, that doesn't mean that smaller businesses can't have something like it. I think it's something the MTA can help deliver."

The first step to encourage MTA members to up their game has been the MTA Growing Talent scheme. This has been set up to help member companies take on new apprentices. Funding of £100,000 has been set aside to provide financial support – from grants of £2,000 through to loans of £10,000. The scheme

is open to MTA members with a turnover of less than £5 million. A maximum of £12,000 is available per year to each member company. The Association is also lead sponsor of new magazine *Engineering Apprentice* (see page 7) to be launched at MACH.

MTA is, in fact, engaged with the current Sector Skills Analysis (SSA) being undertaken by Sector Skills Council SEMTA for its soon to be released SSA for the Metals, Mechanical and Electrical sectors (see page 14). Additionally the Association is fostering relationships with universities, Brunel and Cranfield being the first ports of call. The aim is to get member companies sponsoring MSc students, for example.

Mr Dewhurst is also aiming to broaden Association membership via the introduction of a new 'user partner' category. This will allow users of manufacturing technology – the existing

members' customers – to become associate members. "This will allow sellers of technology to have a closer relationship with users on an ongoing basis and will allow them to understand user needs and so tailor both services, such as training, and their technology."

TARGET COMPANIES

So far, larger OEMs are being targeted, but smaller ones will follow. "We want an engineering-based manufacturing critical mass. Of some 1,200 target companies, a third have been mailed and responses are coming back. We want 100 user-partner members by the end of this year."

This should see membership swell to over 350 companies giving MTA a significant voice at government level.

In addition, the director general wants the Association to create a federation of associations. MTA already acts as the secretariat for the Federation of British

Hand Tool Manufacturers (FBHTM) and the British Hardmetal and Engineers' Cutting Tool Association (BHECTA) which have some 30-plus members in total. The associations still have their own members but MTA offers secretariat and other services. Putting his accountant's hat back on, Mr Dewhurst hopes that this, plus an increasing MTA membership, will enable the cost per company of secretariat services to be reduced by 80 per cent over the next three to five years.

But Mr Dewhurst underlines the MTA's biennial MACH exhibition as key in its ability to deliver all the above (see page 35 for *Machinery's* last of three previews). Noteworthy elements of the show include: 'New at MACH' (see page 23); the launch of *Engineering Apprentice*; companies being invited to bring their apprentices along; and a 'Teach the Teacher' day where school teachers get a structured taste of engineering. □

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