

Dedicated vision for UK manufacturing



Emma Mulligan of the National Skills Academy for Manufacturing tells Brian Wall why world-class manufacturing requires world-class skills

The National Skills Academy for Manufacturing is an employer-led organisation, dedicated to working with UK manufacturers to deliver an independent, national standard for manufacturing training content, advice and delivery.

And when it comes to applying that standard in the workplace, the Skills Academy has a clear vision and remit as to how that should be achieved. As head of business development Emma Mulligan (right) points out: "Our role is to help make manufacturing companies globally competitive through people and skills, and to strive for excellence."

To that end, all training solutions developed and approved by the Skills Academy possess the 'badge of quality' to match those world-class standards. Moreover, its brand has come to be seen as a vital safeguard against poor training and a beacon of security for manufacturing employers.

Programmes are developed directly with



employers, ensuring their needs are reflected within the sector. "The use of world-leading training techniques – and trainers – also ensures the maximum return on investment and the best solution for UK plc," Mulligan points out.

The quality of training is vital, she adds. Poor training can be worse than no training. "People are at the heart of every business; their performance has a direct impact on productivity and profitability. Effective learning can help them to reach their full potential and significantly increase the ability of any business to compete successfully in the ever-changing global marketplace. Moreover, by ensuring skills levels are improved across the organisation, the competitive position of UK manufacturing is enhanced, enabling the sector to move forward and tackle new challenges."

As part of its commitment to deliver against these training and skills objectives, the Skills Academy seeks to align itself with organisations and opportunities that promote a similar vision for the industry – and the Best Factory Awards have claimed an important stake in that. In fact, it was instrumental last year in establishing a new BFA category – the Skills Development Award, won by Power Panels Electrical Systems – working with Cranfield School of Management to establish

the criteria that entrants would have to meet. "The involvement of Cranfield in the judging process gives the awards enormous credibility," states Mulligan.

One of the most significant benefits of the BFAs, she adds, is that they enable companies to celebrate excellence by benchmarking themselves against their peers. "As a result, it becomes a highly effective marketing tool. Power Panels Electrical Systems is a fantastic example of that in action. Their success has been a great way to show other manufacturing businesses what can be achieved."

However, the mention of success cannot but be tempered by questions about the current downturn in the economy, which is bringing severe challenges to SME manufacturing companies. "Yes, businesses are having to do everything faster and more intensely," she concedes, "but slashing training budgets or cutting back on skills is not the answer. Otherwise, when companies emerge from the recession, they won't be able to take advantage of the opportunities that arise. Those who continue to train and upskill in difficult times will be in a far better position."

The Skills Academy has devised a recession toolkit to help support manufacturing through the downturn. Delivered through three-hour workshops, the toolkit builds into action plans that support cost and cash management, and take strategic advantage out of the current crisis. "It not only helps businesses to survive the recession," concludes Mulligan, "but shows them how to win through and prosper." ■

System that drives learning

The National Skills Academy for Manufacturing recommends a systematic approach to learning. Called the Learning Engine, it consists of five key steps:

- Analyse impartially: understanding the skills you need to deliver your business objectives is critical to business success
- Prepare collaboratively: ensuring both the business and individual understand the training programmes and related expectations will deliver superior results
- Deliver powerfully: training that is delivered in an engaging informative manner will result in more enjoyment, retention and a better overall result
- Follow through thoroughly: ensuring you use any new skill is vital in achieving results and striving for excellence
- Evaluate honestly: asking 'how did we do' and 'what can we build on' will create the virtuous learning spiral that will move your business and employees to the next level.

The National
Skills Academy
FOR MANUFACTURING

0121 329 1970
www.nsa-m.co.uk