

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

...a Process Operator Manufacturing Technician

Chris Sinclair-James joined the Total Oil Refinery in Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire as a Trainee Process Operator 6 years ago. After leaving school he first worked as a mechanic on heavy plant and equipment. He later trained and worked as an installation electrician and gained City & Guilds qualifications at a local College.

He had always wanted to work at the Refinery. Through friends he knew that the work was stimulating and there were good opportunities for growth & personal development, as well as excellent terms and conditions of employment. He applied for a job and duly gained a place on the adult training scheme. His previous training, good mechanical skills and aptitude stood him in good stead for the 6 months specialist training that followed. It started with 6 weeks intensive classroom instruction followed by a programme of supervised work experience on the Refinery's plant.

Since qualifying as a Process Operator, Chris has worked on many of the different parts of the Refinery. Known as production units, these all contribute to the gradual conversion of the incoming North Sea crude oil into petroleum, diesel or kerosene for jet aircraft. His first assignment was to the blending stocks unit. It is the last unit on the refinery and its petroleum product is distributed by ship, pipeline or rail for eventual delivery to garages, supermarkets and large industrial customers.

Each unit is operated by a close knit team of people comprising a Process Engineer, Shift Supervisor, Shift Leader and several Process Operators. Their prime responsibility is to operate the plant safely and in strict accordance with the laid down operating procedures. Together they work to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of their particular production unit to the overall safety and profitability of the Refinery.

As a Process Operator Chris, works outdoors and 90% of his time is involved in operating his unit. Because the Refinery operates on a continuous basis, 365 days per year, Chris and his colleagues follow strict rotation patterns. They work a 12 hour shift pattern comprising 4 days on followed by 4 days of then 4 nights on followed by 4 days off. Starting at either 06.30 or 18.30 each shift begins with handover briefings which include: production volumes, technical issues new or ongoing maintenance work, new or revised procedures and methods of working including Health, Safety or Environment procedures. The incoming shift team meet the Team Leader and Shift Supervisor and read through the daily operational instructions in the control room. There is a Team discussion to agree the work, roles and responsibilities for the shift. Then each individual sets about his or her particular work assignment to ensure that the Team's objectives and production volumes are achieved.

Chris believes that a strong mechanical background is essential to the job. But since being with Total he has developed a wide range of new skills including IT, team working, problem solving and communication. He says that is essential to be able to work effectively with different people from different technical teams. To do this you must always be prepared to listen and learn from different points of view.

He is currently working as a Stand-In Team leader and has been seconded to a specialist team that is reviewing and updating production procedures for each of the production units. He hopes that this experience will shortly lead to him being promoted to permanent Team Leader.

Chris is active in Motorsport, particularly off-road 4x4 driving and rallying. His shift work patterns provide him with sufficient time to prepare and drive vehicles, something that a regular 9-5 job could never do.

