

Workforce skills hold key to successful Sembcorp future

SEMBCORP has scored significant employee training and development successes as it leads the way in improving the skills of its workforce.

The industrial utilities and services company, currently in the process of transforming its assets on Teesside, is also investing heavily in its most important asset – its people.

With more than £150m spent revolutionising power production on the Wilton International site since coming to the area in 2003, including through the development of the UK's first large-scale wood to energy power plant, Sembcorp needs its workforce to have pioneering spirit, drive and determination to succeed.

And leading by example are a crop of apprentices who are rising to the challenge and forging exciting careers for themselves.

Youngsters like 20-year-olds Dean Carney and Jade Gofton, both in their final year of the Tees Valley Production Technician (TVPT) apprenticeship. Both have gained a vast amount of experience and a huge array of skills in just over a year at Sembcorp's Wilton Power Station and also within their first two years based at TTE Technical Training Group.

Dean's enthusiasm and commitment recently earned him the Apprentice of the Year title for 2010 at the North East Process Industry Cluster annual awards. He is seen by the management team as intelligent and level-headed with a great ability to absorb detailed information quickly. Even though he is still an apprentice, he has earned a lot of respect from his older, more experienced colleagues.

Jade is completely unfazed by being the only woman in a 13-strong team working 12-hour shifts at the power station. She recently addressed representatives of leading North East companies at the launch of the 100 Apprentices in 100 Days recruitment initiative, sponsored by the National Apprenticeship Service.

Around 30 of the region's top industrialists heard Jade confidently explain how she decided the college and university career path wasn't for her after completing 12 GCSEs at Middlesbrough's Nunthorpe School.

She said: "It's great that lots of my friends have gone to university, but I decided I wanted to follow a different route and earn as I learned. I love what I'm doing and would recommend it to

anyone." Dean and Jade also attend Redcar and Cleveland College on a day-release basis, both studying towards an HNC in chemical engineering which they hope will lead on to a degree.

If either was looking for inspiration they need look no further than their colleague Dean Mitchell who at 27 – just six years after completing his apprenticeship – has risen through the ranks to become one of Sembcorp's most competent operating technicians and the youngest ever utilities shift manager in the 60-year history of power operations on the site.

As well as having management duties in charge of the shift teams, Dean is responsible for the operation and optimisation of Sembcorp's major assets – Wilton Power Station, the water treatment plant and the green energy biomass plant, also known as Wilton 10.

George Ritchie, senior vice-president at Sembcorp and the man in overall charge of the training and development of 400 Teesside-based staff, said: "The world has completely changed for our employees and to stay ahead we've got to change as individuals too. Both Deans and Jade are great examples of that.

"All of our employees know that in 2011 we can't stand still – either as an organisation or as individual people – and we need to strive for continuous improvement in our performance at all levels."

"We've got some tremendously experienced people, but it is well known that a skills gap is developing in the science-related industries as experienced employees retire. It is therefore essential to companies like ours that a new generation of people emerge with the necessary skills that will enable us to operate our assets fully and take advantage of the many business opportunities coming along."

Mr Ritchie, who was instrumental in the establishment of the four-year Tees Valley Production Technician apprenticeship, was also honoured at the North East Process Industry Cluster Awards, gaining the prestigious Outstanding Achievement award for promoting training and skills development in the process industries at a local, regional and national level over three decades.

TVPT is now well-established as a route to permanent careers in the process industries and Sembcorp is currently sponsoring 10 TVPT apprentices. Testament to its success is the fact that even though many manufacturing companies in the area have been through a difficult period in the past few years, all 16 of last year's TVPT graduating class have gained permanent employment at their respective sponsoring companies on Teesside.

The training and development of apprentices is important to any business, but Sembcorp has also gained plaudits for the training and development of its existing staff, ranging in age from the mid-20s to the late 50s. Sembcorp recently became only the fourth businesses in the UK to gain the prestigious Cogent Sector Skills Council



Back centre, Jane Atkinson, Sembcorp vice president utilities operations, with some of the apprentices. Front Jade Gofton and Dean Carney, both 20 and in their final year of the Tees Valley Production Technician apprenticeship

Gold Standard Certificate in recognition of its commitment to working towards the national industry training standard, which sets out the skills required for world-class performance in key job roles in the UK process industry.

Its commitment to training, learning and development was shown through the Assessment System for Employer Training system, delivered by the National Skills Academy Process Industries and designed to benchmark and recognise the content, quality and delivery of in-house training and workforce competence.

Sembcorp, which has held Investors In People status for 10 years, was also honoured twice at the 2010 National Training Awards (NTA). The Protection business, which safeguards industrial assets worth billions of pounds for major international companies on Teesside, won both a regional and national NTA award, becoming the first professional firefighting and spill protection unit in the UK to complete a specially-designed NVQ Level 3 qualification for people in the fire and rescue sector.

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