

SECTOR FOCUS:

ENGINEERING

There's an overall feeling of positivity and possibility in a thriving engineering sector that's driving ever onwards. In this edition's sector focus we address those feelings and examine what is being done to create the engineers of the future. **David Chadwick** reports.



Technical savvy and enterprising spirit drive engineering firms

Lancashire's thriving engineering sector is a legacy of the county's illustrious history, as well as a product of world-class learning programmes provided by colleges and universities. Much is made of the county's global manufacturers, but niche engineering businesses also play a vital role in creating sustainable growth and high value-added development.

"The major strengths of Lancashire's engineering businesses are often at the polar opposites of the supposed 'advanced engineering' spectrum," said Rupert Gatty, managing director at Burnley-based CoolKit, which makes insulated linings for refrigerated vehicles.

"Some of the 'traditional' precision engineering skills and capabilities are as important to maintaining the success of local industries as the high-profile, high-end, knowledge-based manufacturing activities."

This view is endorsed by Wayne Wild, commercial director at fast-growing engineering and fabrication company WEC Group in Blackburn.

Wayne would like to see more government support for businesses of WEC Group's size, which are bigger than SMEs, but not operating on the scale as industrial giants such as Rolls-Royce or BAE Systems.

"Firms like ours – and there are many in Lancashire – are caught in the middle, between SMEs and the bigger powerhouse groups, and as a result I feel we are being largely ignored," commented Wayne.

"The support network exists for SMEs, but if a business such as WEC Group wants to look at European funding, for instance, then we have to do it ourselves, with no support at all. And we have to finance the bid ourselves. That needs to change. The government should adopt direct funding schemes that cut out red tape

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to Lancashire engineering sector, but do other types of engineering businesses receive the recognition they deserve?

"In short, no," said Rupert. "Although the two sectors are undeniably important, other sectors deliver essential economic contributions to the county and the North in general.

"Nuclear, oil and gas, and rail are three prominent sectors within the engineering sphere, with many businesses spreading their commercial risk between these and automotive and aerospace."

Professional advisory firms are also seeing signs from their clients that the engineering industry is growing, as well as creating increasing numbers of jobs.

"Lancashire should continue to focus on strengthening its engineering base by targeting innovation, skills and the supply chains to ensure Lancashire remains a competitive location that attracts investors," commented Pauline Rigby, head of the corporate and restructuring team at Forbes Solicitors.

"We are noting that our clients are realising the full potential of the region's engineering



Wayne Wild

sector. They are maximising innovation and focusing on growth, including obtaining the necessary skills for growth."

Initiatives such as the introduction of UCLan's engineering

innovation centre will be essential if the county is to continue raising performance standards.

"Our clients believe the objectives of the engineering innovation centre will focus on the skills required for growth and also underpin supply chain engagement, innovation and business support," added Pauline. "The facility will additionally provide SMEs with access to state-of-the-art equipment and testing facilities."

What, then, does the future look like for the engineering sector in Lancashire?

"The future is largely bright, especially with devolution away from 'London-centricity' and support for growth in the region from various initiatives," said Rupert.

"For example, the European Regional

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Pauline Rigby

Development Fund – which has provided more backing for the North West than any other region – will surely serve to support the delivery of long-term competitiveness and growth in employment."

This optimism is shared by Wayne, who points to WEC Group's continuing investment in its own apprenticeship

scheme, purchasing new equipment, and acquiring new premises, along with other businesses.

This expansion includes a waterjet cutting operation that is forecasting sales of more than £2m in 2015, as well as the launch of a new powder coating division and the purchase of a six-acre site at the Walker Business Park in Blackburn, for future expansion. Additionally, WEC acquired the business and some assets of struggling South Yorkshire-based metal manufacturing specialist MTL Group, saving 135 jobs.

"All the investments WEC Group makes are underpinned by our confidence in the future of Lancashire's engineering sector, which plays a vital role in the county's economy," added Wayne.

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We have almost 100 years' experience advising engineering and manufacturing companies and we know how important these industries are to the north, both culturally and economically.

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BLACKPOOL AND THE FYLDE COLLEGE: OUTSTANDING ENGINEERING TRAINING

An outstanding reputation for quality training, expert tutors who have worked in the industry and state-of-the-art facilities make Blackpool and The Fylde College (B&FC) the first choice for training for the Engineering sector. The College is currently the highest performing FE College in England for student success and maintains high academic standards.

The College works closely with industry to ensure it delivers the skills and training to help businesses stay competitive, from apprenticeships through to degrees. Technical skills delivery programmes are aligned to emerging skills gaps based upon Lancashire LEP priorities and Labour Market Intelligence.

In addition teaching staff embed employability skills into the programme of learning. Examples include time management, research skills, working in teams and managing projects as well as guest lectures, live assignment briefs, employer input into course design and assessment and meaningful work experience to ensure students are work-ready.

B&FC rates employer engagement highly in contributing to the success of its engineering programmes. Executive Director Daryl Platt explains:

“At B&FC we work in partnership with employers to ensure that the provision which we offer meets all of the skills requirements of industry and delivers sustainable employment opportunities for our students. Listening to our employers is at the heart of this.”

This is a strategy which is working for B&FC, which says employer feedback and satisfaction rates suggest businesses are benefitting from investing in their workforce with the College.

On the flipside, College careers advisors are working with high schools to promote engineering as a vibrant career choice. Their work encompasses a full range of activities including the Young Engineers STEM Skills Challenge, a high-profile competition for local high schools, to inspire, enthuse and

engage young people in STEM, as well as ‘meet the expert’ evenings and WISE: women into science and engineering. In short, the College is supporting industry in return by inspiring the next generation to work in the industry.



Forward planning is fundamental and the College continues to invest in facilities for learning to enhance its curriculum delivery. Daryl Platt continues: “If we are to address the skills gap, employers must ensure that their existing workforce continue to develop their skills set and keep pace with emerging technologies.”

For further information about how B&FC can help your business, or if you wish to engage with the College on the engineering skills agenda, please contact the Skills and Business Development team on 01253 504 343 or email business@blackpool.ac.uk

We have developed a new foundation degree in in Aerospace Engineering in consultation with BAE systems and our Advanced Technology Centre, due to open in September 2015, will feature the most cutting-edge technology to drive skills in the advanced engineering and manufacturing industries.

This is a continually evolving landscape and we continue to work in partnership with industry to ensure all future needs are met.

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Darrell Matthews: Q AND A: ENGINEERING IS RISING TO STIFF CHALLENGES

Lancashire's engineering firms are among the finest in the world, but recruitment remains a major issue. Darrell Matthews, regional director at EEF, the manufacturers' organisation, answers some key questions

Q. Is the traditional view of engineering firms as 'metal bashers' outmoded?

A. Yes. Lancashire has a wealth of diverse manufacturing and engineering companies that produce world class products in clean environments involving new technologies. From textiles to defence to production of circuit boards and sensors, manufacturers are skilled problem solvers. Of course there is still some 'industrial' production but generally the sector has evolved, where production lines are more automated and human involvement is more technical.



Q. What sort of people and roles do engineering businesses need?

A. These range from qualified engineers to chemical experts to skilled machine operators through to marketing and HR. One very clear trend, though, is that roles are only going to become more highly skilled. We're on the cusp of a global, technology-driven fourth industrial revolution – Industry 4.0 – which is being driven by rapid advances in technology. This is going to play to Britain's strength as a high-value manufacturer. We're going to see even greater convergence between technology, design and engineering – young people leaving school or university or an apprenticeship with those skills are going to be well-paid and in demand.

Q. Is the skills gap being effectively tackled?

A. Nowhere near enough is being done. Manufacturing is going to need one million workers by 2020 just to replace those retiring or leaving industry. This doesn't even take into account the pressure that we're going to come under due to rapid advancements in technology and the arrival of Industry 4.0.

Q. What is being done to attract young people into engineering?

A. Manufacturers are taking action by boosting their investment in higher-level skills. Four in ten are offering placements and internships to undergraduates, while almost a quarter are sponsoring students through university. They are also offering Higher Apprenticeships and supporting existing employees through university.

We need to spread the word that a career in our sector is an attractive, exciting and equal opportunity for all. Lancashire has some great employers – Benjamin Farnworth recently won EEF's National 1st Year Apprentice award, and is having a great impact at his company Techni-Grind Machining in Preston, proving it's not just BAE in the area that is investing in brilliant young people.

James Blackburn
Managing Director
The Vedas Group



The real costs of recruitment

If it's not the recruitment fees or advertising costs, it's the downtime caused by the exiting member of staff and introduction of a new one or just the amount of management time spent short listing and interviewing candidates.

A recent study from Oxford Economics suggested that it can cost businesses in the region of £30k to replace a member of staff.

Research from the Federation of Small Business states that one in four businesses highlighted the cost of hiring skilled staff as a barrier to growth.

In an SME your people are your business, so recruiting the right talent is imperative but where time, skills or resources are limited this can be a problem.

Whilst everyone knows we are in a candidate rich market that also has its downside in that advertising one role can lead to an average of 100 applications.

The odds may seem stacked against you – but there is a new solution. It is a culmination of these reasons that we felt the recruitment system was not working as well as it could particularly for businesses here in East Lancashire.

Vedas have delivered the National Careers Service since 2001, the Work Programme since 2011 as well as working in partnership with the Job Centres and many leading colleges and development agencies in the area.

This puts us in a unique situation as far as recruitment agencies go – it means we are in a position to do something about it, hence the launch of our No Cost Recruitment service at the start of the year.

We have set out with the aim of re-inventing and simplifying the recruitment process, crucially saving businesses time and money and getting local people the right local jobs.

The Vedas Group has been established since 1999 and we have extensive experience in delivering employment support and people development programmes throughout Lancashire, working with employees and job seekers – helping them to find and gain training and work.

This means that uniquely for a recruiter, we work as much for the candidate as for the employer and so we see the jobs market from both sides at all levels and this is crucial.

There are three core elements to our No Cost Recruitment service:

1. We have streamlined the process of finding and recruiting talent – making it quick and accurate to achieve through a new slick online solution.
2. That online solution is supported by our experienced, professional team of recruiters.
3. This whole process is 100% cost free – hence No Cost Recruitment. So far since we launched this service at the start of 2015 we have already saved businesses in East Lancashire in the region of quarter of a million pounds.

What have you got to lose, give us a try and we could help save your businesses time and money and get the right person for your next role.

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Producing the engineering talent of the future

Research suggests that one in five young people will need to become an engineer by 2020 if the UK is to address the sector's looming skills shortages.

The study, by the Royal Academy of Engineering, says closing this skills gaps is crucial to enabling the nation to make the most of high value-added advanced manufacturing.

Lancashire universities and colleges are playing a vital role in delivering the skills that are needed, with ambitious projects at UCLan, Lancaster University, Runshaw College and Blackpool and the Fylde College.

Lancaster's new flagship Engineering Building, which opened in March, boasts a world-class environment with specially designed workshops, teaching laboratories and office areas.

"As technologies develop and market opportunities change it's critical that graduate engineers have the skills to acquire new capabilities and continue to learn throughout their careers," said Professor Malcolm Joyce, head of the engineering department at Lancaster University.

Meanwhile, a £30m Engineering Innovation Centre (EIC) – to be completed in 2018 – will establish UCLan as a leading university for

engineering innovation, while supporting an increase of 500 locally trained graduates annually. The university is keen to recruit more women students, who are radically under-represented in the engineering industry.

Frank Hayden, professor of advanced manufacturing, has been appointed as the EIC's director. He said: "What we're creating here over the next three to five years are facilities that will stand the test of time for the next 100 to 150 years."

The county's FE colleges are also making a substantial contribution. Among them is Blackpool and the Fylde College, whose engineering department is one of only a handful in the country to be rated Outstanding by Ofsted.

"We also we have STEM Assured status from national SciTech think tank NEF: The Innovation Institute, so the quality of our training is among the best in the UK," said executive director Daryl Platt.

Another college with high aspirations is Runshaw, which is developing a new Science, Engineering and Innovation Centre (SEIC), with support from the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The facility will become operational in September 2016 and enable



University of Central Lancashire



Lancaster University

the college to significantly enhance its engineering provision.

"We will be better equipped than ever to enable the manufacturing and engineering sector in Lancashire to manage growth and replace employees within an ageing workforce," said Adrian Roscoe, business centre manager at Runshaw College.

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Charles Reilly:

Q AND A: A FACE IN ENGINEERING

Q. Who are you?

A. I am Charles Reilly, managing director at Cpack Packaging Machinery Ltd, and Cpack Pendle Ltd.

Q. What does your business do?

A. We design, manufacture, install and service packaging systems for food, pharmaceutical, confectionery and dairy industries to clients across the world. Our machines are in operation from Vladivostok in Russia to Toronto in Canada, and as far south as New Zealand.

Q. What does your job involve?

A. I am responsible for the overall operations of the businesses, direct contact with clients, setting prices and targets for our in-house teams

to improve, and develop our business platform.

Q. What attracted you to the engineering industry?

A. I started as an engineering apprentice at Carrington Packaging in Nelson. My father was an engineer, and my grandfather was a marine engineer in the Merchant Navy, who was killed in action in the North Atlantic in the Second World War.

Q. What is the most rewarding or fulfilling aspect of being an engineer?

A. Taking projects from concept to completion in a client's factory. Putting in place systems that that did not exist. Using the latest manufacturing, techniques, and computer design systems.

Q. Tell us something unusual about yourself?

A. In my spare time I do salsa and ballroom dancing



Charles Reilly

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