

Good practice employer case studies

Case study 2 **adi Group**

Engineering services

Provides services for major manufacturers and multinationals including Cadbury, Jaguar Land Rover, Coca-Cola, BAE Systems and BP

550 employees

Turnover: £80m

Based in Kings Norton in Birmingham, adi Group provides specialist engineering services to a wide range of manufacturing companies. The business has grown four-fold during the past decade and is aiming to achieve a turnover of £200 million within the next five years.

This expansion will involve almost doubling the size of its workforce to employ over 1,000 people. Most will, as now, be employed in hands-on engineering roles. This is one reason why the company is keen to recruit talented young people. It has been training apprentices since its foundation in 1990 and currently has 19 on its books, mostly aged between 16 and 20. Having signed up to the 5% club, by 2020 it has committed to be among those companies where 5% of employees are apprentices, so aims to be employing 50 apprentices.

“There are lots of good reasons for home-growing our people,” says Group Strategic Account Director James

Sopwith. “Having that steady stream of apprentices gives us the opportunity to assess, train and instil in them the adi way of thinking.”

“Our experience of young people coming into the workplace at 16, whilst a general statement, is that they are well schooled academically, but lack many interpersonal, analytical and/or other basic work skills. Typically, most children will have done some form of work placement, but in the main, this has been both short and frequently lacking in quality content.”

To address these shortcomings, the company has developed a unique Pre-Apprenticeship programme in partnership with a local school. It has the potential to provide an additional source of talent, both for adi and for the engineering sector in general, which is currently facing a skills shortage, but the aim is also to raise school awareness of the requirements of business.

The roots of the school partnership is a Business in The Community (BITC) scheme designed to create links between businesses and secondary schools. The company has been working with North Bromsgrove High School, which was undersubscribed and looking for new ways to attract more pupils.

The Pre-Apprenticeship programme offers a group of 14 to 16 year old pupils the opportunity to work at adi one afternoon each week during term-time, throughout the two years when they are studying for GCSEs. There are 12 places on the scheme for each year group. Children learn the core practical skills they would need



in an engineering career, including making components using hand tools, use and communication of technical information, cutting, forming and welding various metals; and assembling electrical circuits and wiring control panels.

“Our experience of young people... is that they’re well schooled academically, but... lack other basic work skills”, James Sopwith, Group Strategic Account Director.

The programme is fully funded by adi, which has developed the course content and accredited it with skills organisation EAL. After two years work the children will have completed a Level 1 qualification in electrical and mechanical engineering. It is hoped that they will then seek to apply for a full apprenticeship in engineering, whether with adi or another company. “Our aim is that they would then be at the top of the pile for companies looking for apprentices,” says Sopwith.

“The CEO of our business was an apprentice, I’m a mechanical engineer and although I didn’t do an apprenticeship, I am passionate about sharing what fantastic careers are available in hands-on engineering roles,” says Sopwith. “As a business, we are totally committed to inspiring children to become engineers.” In addition, he says, the company is a growing and profitable business “and we believe we also have a duty to society to put something back.”

The first intake of 12 students started the first year of their two year course in September 2016. “The course is carried out in our workshops and the students are mentored by our own workforce. They are effectively part of our employee team,” says Sopwith. “When they arrive on their first day they get given a business card with their name on it. We all wear the same workwear here, so they look and feel part of our business and fit in with our other employees.”

“We want to make the whole process as much like getting a job and being employed as possible. We want to inspire the kids, to let them know that engineering is a valuable and well-paid profession, and that adi is a great place to pursue that career. One of our measures of success will be how many of those 14 to 16 year olds join a full-time apprenticeship scheme either with ourselves or another engineering company.”

There are currently no plans in adi to extend the scheme to other secondary schools, but the Group’s aim is to inspire other businesses to launch similar programmes elsewhere. It has made the resources it has created for the scheme available to any other business, in any sector, who want to launch a similar programme.

Meanwhile, admissions at North Bromsgrove High School have increased. Sopwith is at pains to stress that there are many other excellent aspects of the school’s progress that have led to this change, but there is some anecdotal evidence that the presence of the Pre-Apprenticeship scheme has been a factor in encouraging some children and their parents to consider the school.