

Winner of the Best Technology Application of the Year

Company PR
September 2017

Raising plastic workforce standards

Last September, Sumitomo (SHI) Demag UK (SDUK) opened its new Training Academy, introducing a structured and progressive beginner to advanced level training programme. Aimed at the entire plastics workforce, in 12-months 22 companies have participated in the programme, including Bericap UK, Essentra Components, Piolax and Broanmain, with all delegates, ranging from mould tool setters to engineers, giving their course a 100% rating.

All seven courses, run at SDUK's Daventry-based Academy, are designed to be modular and offer logical progression from basic tool setting to advanced process engineering, creating a skilled workforce that addresses workforce retention and labour shortages. Research released by Engineering UK in 2017 indicates that 265,000 skilled entrants will be required annually to meet demand for engineering enterprises to 2024*.

SDUK managing director Nigel Flowers explains: *"Skills shortages account for 30%** of all vacancies in manufacturing and we are acutely aware that this is especially prevalent in the polymer sector. Through this Academy, we are helping to address so many challenges, from workforce confidence, job satisfaction and retention, to manufacturing productivity and process optimisation. Businesses that have taken part to-date quickly reported tangible business improvements."*

Tracking progress and productivity

Prior to each three-day workshop, customers usually collect and collate live machinery data, including cycle production time, daily output and the injection pressure for a typical component. This information is then compared to performance post-training to measure improvements.

Tool setting technician knowledge is a key area where participants report improvements. By benchmarking technical understanding before and after every course, the level 2 Tool Technician module has resulted in an average 52% knowledge increase among delegates. SDUK calculates that this increased confidence among tool setters saves businesses around 30 minutes for each tool change, equating to approximately four hours more machine uptime each week.

Customers are also logging instant machine and productivity improvements. For Piolax, completion of the Process Technician module by 12 of their operatives resulted in a 9.9 second reduction in cycle time, increasing output of cable ties, for example, by 31,800 parts per day. Piolax plant manager John Clough comments: *"Our entire workforce embraced this training programme fully, and they all value how much has been invested in developing their future skills."*

Similarly, Essentra Components recorded a 250,000 weekly increase in the production of components after its workforce completed the Mould Mounting, Toolsetting Technology and Process Technician courses.

Plastic fantastic - renewed enthusiasm for IM careers

Staff satisfaction is equally high, with many participant companies reporting that their injection moulding workforce has new enthusiasm in their job.

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“For some experienced team members it has been a good refresher, for all an opportunity to learn and apply new processing skills and techniques,” says Chris Butler, process development manager at Essentra Components. *“The future of our company relies on us providing quality, industry supported training and giving the right opportunities to those who wish to progress.”*

Broanmain’s operations director Jo Davis concurs, describing how the SDUK training offer prompted their business to rethink their recruitment approach. *“Appointing tool setters in our location has been a significant problem. Rather than taking the usual route of recruiting a processor with on-the-job experience, we opted to use SDUK’s training facility to recruit someone that fit our team culture instead.”*

Maria joined Broanmain in January 2017 with no previous injection moulding experience. She completed the three-day Introduction to Injection Moulding course in February and the Process Technician module in May. Maria immediately applied her knowledge to troubleshooting and within six-months is now managing three of Broanmain’s largest machines, completing over eight tool changes weekly. *“The training provided me with more interest in my actual job,”* Maria said in her feedback form after attending the introductory course.

Jo adds: *“Maria’s enthusiasm for learning and appetite to extend knowledge is testament that SDUK’s Academy is what our industry needs. We now plan to recruit and develop future recruits this way and use the training facility to widen the expertise and depth of knowledge and increase workforce retention across our entire business.”*

The Academy currently offers seven course modules. In 18 months, a trainee with little of no knowledge of injection moulding processes can gain an advanced knowledge, with the level of complexity increasing incrementally.

Those attending the Process Technician training are encouraged to return for a practical assessment test within six months of course completion to demonstrate practical competence and knowledge retention. To support Continuing Professional Development (CPD), later this year the SDUK training team plans to instigate a 3-6 month post-course follow up for every delegate, ensuring that the training continues to be embedded, identify future shortfalls and advise on next steps each student can take.

Technical Consultant Darren Vater-Hutchison who created and runs the seven courses adds: *“By equipping these workforces with the skills to work safer, more productively and achieve optimum machine performance, within a short timeframe, customers are achieving better processing stability and increased output.”*

Sources:

* https://www.engineeringuk.com/media/1356/enguk_report_2017_synopsis.pdf

** Page 42 of <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukces-employer-skills-survey-2015-uk-report>

ENDS

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Images /captions:



Image 1: Strong work ethic, problem solving and specialist technical skills in high demand



Image 2: Workforce training supports development of skills



Image 3: Practical demos on SDUK equipment, plastic materials and ancillaries feature strongly in Academy workshops

Notes to the editor

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Sumitomo (SHI) Demag Plastics Machinery UK Ltd. is a 100% wholly owned subsidiary of Demag Plastics Group in Schwaig, Germany, established in 1956. Demag Plastics Group specialises in engineering injection moulding machines with clamping forces between 250 kN and 20,000 kN. Used by many thousand injection moulders all over the world, Demag Technology produces plastic parts made from thermoplastic, elastomer and thermoset materials for a wide variety of end user industries. These include automotive, IT, packaging, electric/electronic, medical and pharmaceutical, building products and leisure.

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Currently, Sumitomo (SHI) Demag UK services more than 4,000 injection moulding machines in the UK and Ireland and has approximately 200 customers (Proctor & Gamble, Philips Avent, GCS Group and Hozelock are some of the most well-known).

<http://uk.sumitomo-shi-demag.eu/>