



PAPER TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 52
NUMBER 2
APRIL 2011

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE PAPER INDUSTRY TECHNICAL ASSOCIATION



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- **'SPECIFIC REFINING INTENSITY'**
 - ways to optimise strength and minimise energy usage
- **'LEADERSHIP'** – current UK leaders discuss what it takes to reach the top
- **REVIEW** of PITA / Proskills Training Workshop & all your regular features

Paper Industry Training



What did you say?

Tuesday 29 March saw one of the largest gatherings in the UK paper industry in recent years, which is testament to the concerns felt by many about the importance of training. Around 80 participants from over 50 organisations (including representatives from 20 manufacturers – mills, converters and suppliers) attended this inaugural event in Birmingham to discuss the state of the current training offering and how it meets the needs of the industry.

"Generally accepted that Industry training is disjointed and not fit for purpose. The true value in this meeting will be to address this issue and help develop a framework necessary to support the industry."

The format encompassed both lectures and two intensive workshops, where participants were encouraged to discuss then give feedback upon two specific questions.

Before going further it should be noted the question of training will be viewed purely from the point of industry-specific requirements. Training to improve basic skills such as literacy, and to develop 'general' competences such as management, accountancy and engineering – these courses are all available to a some extent throughout the country since they cater for skills than are not industry-specific, although even for these courses it was evident that many participants were unaware of exactly what is on offer. Whereas some of the day was spent on discussing such general topics, and several providers of this

type training were present, most of the discussion centred upon the inadequacies in current provision for industry-specific training, specifically the lack of choice regarding both provision and qualifications, and what should be done to improve the issue.

Presentations

After a short introduction by Bob McLellan (**DS Smith Packaging**), Jonathan Ledger (**Proskills**) started the formal proceedings with a talk about current funding support for training in general. What emerged was: (a) there is a lot of money available, and certain pots are under spent; (b) access to funding tends to be both age related and dependent upon the type of course / qualification being undertaken; (c) some funds are only available to SMEs; and, (d) there are important regional differences in funding availability.

The audience was left with the impression that funding for a wide variety of training can be obtained, although the employer must be prepared to put a certain amount of money into the pot as well – no scheme covers all costs. However, the exact nature of training courses available to the industry was left to other speakers to relate.

Next Matthias Bradel (**Paper Centre, Gernsbach**) related the scope of their offering in terms of training and equipment. The school has received both state and industry funding, to the tune of 100M EUR since it started, with 65% provided by industry. They offer internationally recognised certificates in



paper making and are used widely by German, Austrian and Swiss mills - in addition several of the larger mills in the UK send students. Feedback forms uniformly noted the excellence of the facilities and training offered, and some lamented the lack of similar provision in this country.

"Outlined exactly what we should be doing, but are failing to."

The next two speakers discussed various technicalities of training schemes in the UK. Steve Craske (**LITS Ltd**) went first, describing the value of apprenticeships in the paper industry with particular regard to an initiative being undertaken in Kent and the South East. This was the first talk to mention formal qualifications in the science of paper manufacture – a level 2 papermaking certificate being the sole current example. Next, Peter Grice (**PAAVQSET**) laid out the process by which a recognised qualification is taken through various stages of registration – from first being written, it then passes through up to ten stages where it is assimilated by a recognised body, accredited, and eventually can be offered by a training provider. This highlighted that development of a new qualification is not a quick process!

In both of these talks it became apparent that, as regards formal and specific qualifications for the paper and converting industries, we are woefully under resourced. Only a few years ago, the new recruit could study at two universities (UMIST and Robert Gordon) and Bury College; education was available at degree and postgraduate, HNC, HND, and City & Guilds certificate levels. With the reduction in demand caused by contraction of our industry, most notably over the last decade, we now have a single paper manufacturing qualification of relatively low level; a similar level qualification is offered to the board converting sector. Welcome though these qualifications are, what we are missing is range – Peter described 8 levels of vocational qualification – the paper and converting industries have lost all the higher end courses over the last few years. That is not to say training at higher grades than 'level 2' is not undertaken in this country – however, such training is done by specialist providers and does not lead to formal qualifications.

The final talk was given by John Mulholland (**NIFES Consulting Group**) on the subject of Energy Management EN16001 and its implications for staff training and development. This standard involves rolling out best practice and is being used already by several manufacturers including **Metsä** (Finland), **Stora Enso** (Sweden – several sites) and **Van Houtum** (The Netherlands). Part of the standard is specifically related to training – there is a significant people and skills implication, hence its inclusion in this meeting to highlight up and coming skills provision that will be needed in our energy-intensive industry.

Workshop sessions

There was a certain amount of overlap between the two workshops and the lectures; to prevent duplication in reporting, what is described below concerns the main output solely from the workshop discussions.

"Flushed out the relevant issues."

1. What is available and what is missing from the overall skills offer?

The inadequate and somewhat chaotic nature of the current training available was highlighted by many participants. However, reasons for this were also discussed: the fact the industry has shrunk significantly in recent years; colleges tend to drop courses if there is insufficient student interest; and the industry itself has not always attracted the best calibre staff due to its poor image.

The fragmented offering of courses was highlighted time and again. Some were seen as little better than 'tick box' exercises – they affirmed what a student could already do, but were not seen to stretch candidates or offer value to a company. Indeed, questions were asked as to whether the providers actually understand what the industry requires.

There was a lack of clarity about funding – many found the current regime confusing, and occasionally it was found necessary to ally training with funding, not with business need.

Due to the lack of formal courses available, most mills have turned to other means to get the necessary staff training. Many rely on suppliers to train staff and fill skills gaps; some manufacturers write their own training material; and most turn to a small number of well-known and trusted private training providers, who produce specially tailored courses. In addition, some mills group together to pool training resources (notably in Kent and the North West). Where no formal qualifications are taken, the company must pay the full costs as government money is not available. Currently the businesses that go down this route do so because they feel the education their staff receive adds value to the company, whereas the current formal provision does not.

"Training (in Germany) is clearly government supported and it shows with a strong well respected training structure – UK falls woefully short."

Finally, with the presentation from Gernsbach on the programme, comments were made on the possible benefits of a qualification scheme that could be recognised Europe-wide.

2. What would the successful skills offer look like?

To start with it was felt that any scheme must be deemed fit for purpose, and benefit the industry in general. But in our cash-straitened times, it must also be cost effective. Central government is unlikely to pick up the tab to equip a new university or college department, so some degree of realism is required.

Most importantly the learning – whether it leads to formalised qualifications or not – must be agreed with the industry. Employers must reengage with the training providers and explain what is required in-depth.

Flexibility in terms of delivery was another prominent requirement. This may mean taking account of shift patterns; being prepared to deliver at weekends; and mix in-house, distance and offsite delivery. Minimising time off-site would seem best, especially for the lower level training.

As regards development of formal qualifications, there was no definite feeling either way. Some wanted them; others just wanted courses, whether they led to formal qualifications or

"Overall a very worthwhile workshop and surely a good launch pad to improve the skills / qualification landscape within our sector."

not. Whatever the training, it was felt it should be both appropriate and fully supportive of end-to-end career progression.

Finally it was recognised that while general training needs to be improved in both manufacturing and converting sectors (which includes corrugating and tissue), highly specialised courses tailored to a specific product would still have to be delivered in-house, even if for one mill that meant training the external trainer before he could deliver the training!

The Future

Where do we go from here? Well, as the feedback forms highlighted, this meeting laid bare the current state of training provision for the industry as a whole – and what it showed was a general level of dissatisfaction in the current offering. Inadvertently it also uncovered a number of issues that have sprung up since alongside the decline in relevant courses; for example, with devolution of the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies, some funding provision differs in these regions relative to England.

An initial assessment, obtained both by talking to participants and reading the feedback forms, suggests the underlying messages to be that:

- Improved communication is needed on all aspects of skills / training, especially funding and how it differs around the regions;
- Access to industry-specific training at a greater range of levels than are currently available is required;

- The training offering needs to be made more relevant to the industry;
- The training requirement is for converting as well as manufacturing sectors;
- The training offering should be cost effective (both for the employer and the provider) and flexible; and finally,
- Some degree of harmonisation with Europe may be a way forward.

To carry any of these changes through, however, the industry must be prepared to commit numbers, time, energy and cash to generate the critical mass needed to re-energise the training offering.

As Tom Bowtell (**Proskills**) commented, "This successful meeting demonstrated the passion and commitment the industry has for training and up-skilling its workforce. The valuable input received will help shape Proskills' work with the industry and result in viable solutions."

Finally, with the presence of some of our most senior mill management at the meeting, the importance of this topic cannot be in doubt. Time is now needed to digest the information obtained from the workshops before acting to address the concerns raised (a measured stride in the right direction, rather than a knee jerk). Nevertheless, there is a clear message emanating from the meeting that training is once again high on the agenda, and that message will be the basis of future plans to support our industry.

"This is what the Industry needs - a first class meeting. Let's keep it going!"

**PARSONS
REISS**

Your Partner in Progress

- ✓ Design & Manufacture
- ✓ Project Management
- ✓ Process Engineering
- ✓ Turnkey Projects
- ✓ Machine Runnability
- ✓ Energy Efficiency

Our Specialist Knowledge delivers Unique Solutions

Parsons Reiss | Eton Hill Road | Radcliffe | Manchester | M26 2ZT
Tel: +44 (0) 161 724 6634 | Fax: +44 (0) 161 723 1661 | Web: www.parsonsreiss.com