



COMMENT

# Apprenticeship a breath of fresh air

**W**e are familiar with hearing companies complain about the paucity of the UK's skills base in engineering and manufacturing, so I was heartened to hear this week about one company that is doing something practical about the skills shortage.

ACW Technology, a Southampton-based contract electronics manufacturer, has set up an apprentice scheme in a bid to encourage fresh blood into the industry.

This is not a traditional engineering apprentice scheme, but aimed at developing skills across the business from purchasing through to engineering. The company's first trainee, Nikki Lynch, has joined the global purchasing team.

What is refreshing about this approach is that it learns from the experiences of the past when employers took more responsibility for developing skills through apprentice schemes, and it is an antidote to the current malaise of companies all too happy to blame the universities for not giving them candidates with the right skills.

The apprenticeship is an antidote to the malaise of firms all too happy to blame universities

"The UK electronics and manufacturing sector remains vibrant, but the workforce is aging and the industry is crying out for an injection of fresh, young blood. We've decided to revert to the old-fashioned apprentice scheme. By investing in educating our own people, we can bring them up to the required standard quickly," says Owen Reeves, managing director at ACW Technology.

One of the most important features of the apprentice scheme for the trainee is that it provides high-value, on-the-job training and they get a salary at the same time.

The beauty of basing this on the traditional apprentice scheme is that it provides trainees with a route to recognised qualifications. By the time Nikki completes her apprenticeship, she will have Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply recognised qualifications as well as the security of a job.

This would seem to be a simple and effective way for companies to start addressing the skills shortages that still seem to be the daily topic of conversation in this industry. ●

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