



Hanson Reports Significant Business Improvement From Training in the Recession

Company background

Hanson is part of the HeidelbergCement Group, which employs 61,000 people worldwide. In the UK, Hanson is the leading supplier of heavy building materials to the construction industry, producing aggregates (crushed rock, sand and gravel), ready-mixed and precast concrete, asphalt and cement-related materials and a range of building products including clay bricks and roof tiles, lightweight and dense concrete blocks and concrete pavers.

The Problem

Hanson UK's building products division, like all organisations in the construction industry supply chain, has experienced the full impact of the global recession, and as a result, seen a downturn in operations. However, rather than taking a more immediate reaction to a reduction in business and letting valuable staff go, the company took a longer term decision to maintain staff and to use this downtime productively to retrain and upskill its workforce.

Steven Godfrey, works manager at Hanson's Desford brick works in Leicestershire, is a strong advocate of the benefits of training, and recognises the importance of a highly trained and motivated team to the company. "It's been a tough time for business, especially with the downturn in the construction industry, but at the same time, Hanson is also looking to the future, and to be ready for the upturn in activity, we acknowledge that the company can only be as good as its workforce and a skilled team is vital for future growth," said Steven.

The Solution

The company therefore committed to a series of training initiatives for just over half of its 68-strong workforce at its Desford site, including refresher courses on health, safety and the environment, run on site by the company's internal and group consultancy staff. In addition, Hanson used this time to release ten of its operative staff to complete their NVQ level Two in Business Improvement Techniques (BIT), which was undertaken on site in conjunction with Stoke College.

Steven received the full backing of the Hanson UK management to maintain his workforce and use the time effectively to prepare staff for the upturn in operations.

"Business was pretty slow towards the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, so it made sense to utilise this period to retrain our staff and revisit some health and safety and environmental standards and programmes, all of which are so vital to the safe and smooth-running of our plant," he added.

While this upskilling refresher training did require some investment on Hanson's part in terms of maintaining salaried staff and releasing work hours for training, the company did receive full funding for its BIT course at Stoke College. This funding was instigated by Proskills UK, the Sector Skills Council for the Process & Manufacturing sector which includes Building Products.

"Eric Turner, the Building Industry Lead at Proskills was able to point me in the direction of Stoke College which could offer the BIT course we were looking for, and was also in a position to help us with obtaining government funding for the course. Once we had met with the College and discussed our requirements, it was purely a matter of completing a few forms, and the College did all the rest. I was really impressed by the simplicity of the whole process and the fact that funding was all arranged through Stoke College directly."

The Outcome

The Desford plant has already seen some significant changes as a result of all the refresher and BIT training, not just through improved staff morale and motivation, but throughout the whole operation.

“In general, I believe we have benefited from a significant improvement in production efficiencies,” said Steven. “Not only have the staff gained valuable skills and ten of our team gained a nationally recognised qualification having achieved an NVQ Level Two in Business Improvement Techniques, they are all much more motivated, have a greater understanding of the operation as a whole and appreciate how their individual role affects the wider production chain.”

Following feedback from the course, the company has reviewed its operations, improved working conditions for the workforce and changed the layout of its production area. This has resulted in improved logistics, an increase in production efficiencies and cost savings by introducing a new waste management system as well as experiencing a reduction in operational downtime due to health and safety incidences.

‘Although the BIT course was fully funded, it’s fair to say that there has been some investment on the part of the business this training, and we have also committed to making some internal changes to processes and procedures as a result of staff feedback,” commented Steven. “But this has been significantly outweighed by the benefits and business improvements we have seen throughout our operation and the workforce as a whole.”

Going Forward

As a result of the positive effect that the BIT course, and health, safety and environmental refresher training has had on the business, Steven is keen for the rest of the workforce at Desford to receive the training.

“My goal is to see the rest of the team benefit from this training. It’s a win/win situation. The staff benefit by increasing their skills base and having a greater say and impact on their working environment, while the business benefits through improved staff retention, a highly skilled workforce as well as through production efficiencies and cost savings.”

How Proskills can help

Proskills has worked hard with industry employers and providers to ensure that the Skills agenda is a top priority. The challenge of training staff to help support and improve normal business activity requires commitment and resolve, particularly in these difficult times. The foundations of Proskills’ offering to the sector are now in place in the form of an agreement with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to secure £62m of funded

investment for Proskills industries, along with the new National Skills Academy for Materials, Production and Supply (MPS - Academy). Contained within these two key strands are a range of support and development offers for employers, such as the Performance and Competitiveness Programme, Leadership and Management, Skills For Life, Apprenticeships and more.

Call Eric Turner on 07974 258319 or email eric.turner@proskills.co.uk to find out how your organisation can benefit from skills investment.