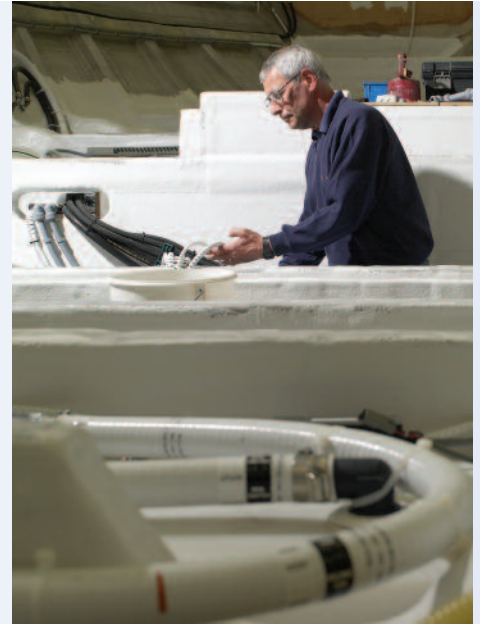


David Hurst,
Manufacturing Director
Fairline Boats

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The Sector Skills Council
for Science, Engineering and
Manufacturing Technologies



Championing the marine sector skills agreement

Fairline Boats is a key player in the growing UK leisure boat manufacturing sector. Employing 1,200 employees in Oundle and Corby, Northamptonshire, the company has an annual turnover of £120 million, exports 85% of its products and enjoys a growth rate of 8-10% per annum. The company is a member of the British Marine Federation and actively contributes to Semta's marine Sector Strategy Group.

With a strong automotive background, David Hurst joined the company as Manufacturing Director in 2004 and has experienced the major impact the Marine Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) has had on Fairline's business. "Being involved in the process has opened our eyes, influenced our thinking and helped clarify things," he says. Developed by marine sector employers for the marine sector and brokered by Semta, the SSA uses Semta's Business to Skills matrix to identify business objectives and benefits following which, the workforce skills needs and how they will be delivered are defined. Focussing on the Agreement has led the company to put in place an effective training system for young people, develop a process for upskilling and improve performance through business leadership. Moreover, the process

helped the business clarify its investment decisions and maximise its return on that investment.

Apprentice training

"The Sector Skills Agreement was key to unlocking apprenticeships in our company," David explains. "Previously we weren't using an appropriate qualification and were disappointed with the output. Discovering NVQs which had been written specifically for the marine sector enabled us to take the qualifications to our local college where lecturers understood them and could deliver them to our apprentices." As a result Fairline has increased its annual apprentice intake from two or three to ten. In addition to aiding the company's growth, the move has been a great morale booster and won union support. A new venture in seeking volunteers to mentor apprentices met with a huge response and provides an additional development opportunity for existing employees. "Apart from securing our skills base for the future, taking on apprentices sends out a message to employees that the management believes in its future," says

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employer champion



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For further information please
contact:

Darren Race
Wynyard Park House
Wynyard Park
Billingham
TS22 5TB

Tel: 01740 627000
Email: drace@semta.org.uk
www.semta.org.uk

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David, "It puts a more human face on the business, demonstrating our growing belief in people and the important contribution they make." When the company recently advertised for apprentices it attracted around 150 applicants, 40% of them children of employees – a massive vote of confidence in the company.

Upskilling

Many members of Fairline's workforce are long-serving employees who left school with no qualifications. Now, for the first time, Fairline is helping them achieve a relevant qualification. Taking the SSA as a frame of reference, the company is offering its 200 moulders the chance of gaining EAL's Level 2 NVQ in Marine Engineering, in partnership with local provider, Tresham Institute of Further and Higher Education. Working initially with a pilot group, college staff have developed an in-company programme to enable employees to meet the NVQ requirements, and visit the workplace to carry out observation and assessment. The programme is being extended to further cohorts. "Employees have shown a high level of interest," David comments. "It's good for morale, good for the company and fits in with the Government's aims to increase the number of people qualified to Level 2."

Lean Leadership

Fairline is taking an innovative approach to tackling two of the key priorities identified in the SSA: the need to improve productivity and competitiveness, and to develop management and leadership skills. In a strategic move to

embed lean practices through improved leadership, the company has restructured the business into small sections and is training all 120 section leaders in business improvement techniques. Specialists sourced via the company's partnership with Tresham Institute are delivering EAL's Level 2 Business-Improvement Techniques NVQ to groups across the company to ensure consistency of provision in increasing the skills and knowledge base. The programme represents an investment of £600,000-700,000 over two-three years and has received a financial contribution from a special fund via Semta.

David is leading the lean implementation process, backed by the full commitment of the board. "We're passionate about rolling out lean – not just in the manufacturing areas but in the sales office, the R&D department and in the facilities function. Lean techniques can be applied in any part of an organisation," he says. "It's part of a cultural change process that has to start from the top to ensure success."

David believes that other companies in Semta's footprint should embrace the Sector Skills Agreement relevant to them for the benefit of the whole sector. Explaining how it has helped his company, he says: "As a company we know where we're going. The SSA matches Fairline's aspirations and has given us a structure and context in which to move forward. In what can often appear as an overly-complicated skills system, it provides a relatively simple road map to follow, helping us to understand how things fit together."