

Business in the

Community

The Case for Ceramics

Stoke-on-Trent is recognised as a region of low ambition, coupled with poor rates of academic success. This is representative of many individuals employed within the ceramics sector, leaving school with few or no qualifications and going into labour-intensive ceramic manufacturing jobs. Although many of these roles were highly skilled, there have been few opportunities for these individuals to undertake any form of academic learning. Indeed, until recently, core skills were not considered a priority and have, to a large extent, been ignored.

However, for those employed within this declining sector, often under threat of redundancy, it is of paramount importance that they are not only offered initial help to embark upon essential skills training but that support is available to allow and, in fact, encourage progression.

Wade

Wade has been producing high quality ceramics since 1810. It is a world leader in the manufacture of ceramics for the premiums, incentives, promotional, commemorative and collectable markets and now employs 248 staff in its Stoke-on-Trent factory. As part of its commitment to staff Wade now offers time off for staff to attend essential literacy and numeracy training on site. The programme has so far seen 14 employees achieve level 1 in numeracy and literacy while supervisors have been encouraged to do the fast track training. To encourage a learning at work environment, Wade also supports the local University on the Shop Floor initiative partially funding an IT suite where employees can visit in their own time to further develop their skills. Wade's continuing commitment to training is reflected in its training days policy. In 2003 Wade invested a total of 8 days for all their staff, in 2004 this rose to 294 and for 2005 it is to be 500.

"We can buy a machine from anywhere in the world but we can't just drag people off the street and expect them to do the job without proper training. Essential skills form the basis of all of that." Paul Farmer, Managing Director, Wade
Employees agreed that as a result of Wade's support they feel more involved in the company. "The gap between 'us' and 'them' is closing and it is as if the company is making an effort for us." Anthea Bloor

Royal Doulton

Royal Doulton established themselves as makers of fine English Stoneware as early as 1853. Then, in 1882, Doulton purchased the small factory of Pinder, Bourne and Co, at Nile Street in Burslem, Staffordshire – bringing Doulton right to the heart of The Potteries. Since then Royal Doulton has been leaders in the manufacturing of fine bone china, fine

china and Lambethware. The ceramics manufacturer is however sadly to close Royal Doulton's last remaining UK factory. It is the end of an era for the Potteries, where Doulton has been a major employer for more than 150 years. In support of their employees, CATU, Ceramic and Allied Trades Union, recently encouraged all shop stewards to enrol on a Trade Union Learner Representative course. Consequently Len Bosworth, an employee of Royal Doulton for 31 years presented the case to the company about why they should support employees with the development of their essential skills. With the support of Royal Doulton, CATU and local providers, a programme was started supporting staff in developing their essential skills to ensure future employment. Out of 525 staff 350 went through the initial assessment with 180 over the last year achieving level 1 or 2 in numeracy and literacy. Royal Doulton gives employees half an hour of work time to attend training and classes take place in the relaxed, familiar atmosphere of the canteen ensuring employees then take that learning back to the shop floor. By using assessment forms from other employers and using them to develop skills, employees have the confidence to apply for jobs beyond the ceramics sector. The success of the programme is evident from the enthusiasm of the employees who have gone through the training and the commitment from CATU to drive the importance of this initiative through to other local employers.

"Since the training I now have proof of what I can do with the certificate. I have got something to show for it all. I always thought that I could only work in the ceramics industry but learning really does make you realise what is possible." John

"My partner was the only one who could support my 11 year old daughter with her homework but now I can. When people asked where I could see myself in the future I thought it was here but now I believe that anything is possible if you believe in yourself."
Mandy

The programmes described above are successful as they provide training that is crucial to the individuals taking part. Firstly, those who are leaving the industry will do so with a raft of new skills and the self confidence needed to secure new employment. Secondly, those remaining in the sector need a higher level of skills to meet the demands of new technology if we are to have a workforce equipped for the future.