

*Stefan Rduch has gone from apprentice to managing a multi-million Pound manufacturing facility at KMF (Precision Sheet Metal)*

The dilemma that faces many school leavers is to stay in education or move into vocational training. Companies such as KMF (Precision Sheet Metal) can help justify the decision to go for the latter.

## APPRENTICESHIP DELIVERS REWARDS

**H**aving stayed in education to complete his AS Levels, Stefan Rduch could have continued his education to degree level, but he says: "I knew I wanted something different and to be able to gain some experience in the 'real world'. Apprenticeships had been discussed but it was the offer from KMF that made my mind up, as it offered a well rounded programme that involved shopfloor, office and business development training. I always had a desire to learn how a business functioned and the fact that this formed part of KMF's apprenticeship was exciting to me."

One of the first things KMF apprentices do is to lay out their own five year plans. "I knew from the outset that I wanted to manage" continues Rduch, "but I had no idea what I wanted to manage or how it would happen. This was probably derived from watching my father, who worked in the pottery industry in various management roles. By taking the apprenticeship route to further my education and the opportunity to combine vocational and academic experience into a single training package has allowed me to achieve my goals. I feel that the training moulded me into the person I have become and I am better prepared for the roles that KMF are asking me to fill."

KMF, which now undertakes all of its apprentice training in-house, recognised his enthusiasm and guided him to a more analytical role within the business. Initially this saw him working as a company buyer, managing a spend in excess of £3.5 million. He was also offered further training, completing both HNC and HND in Mechanical Engineering, along with level five of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply's qualification.

In early 2010 an opportunity arose to move into a more 'hands on' production management role within KMF's medical integration facility, overseeing the procurement and production of medical instrumentation, including mass spectrometers. Additional responsibility for a major aerospace sector customer paved the way for his current position as Advanced Solutions Manager, responsible for the new, £1 million Advanced Solutions manufacturing facility, as well as the 30 members of staff it employs.

"Managing this element of the business and its £5



million turnover as well as managing the expected 25% growth in sales is daunting; however my apprenticeship has prepared me well for the challenge. Being given this responsibility at such a young age is testament to the faith that KMF put in me; and also the structure of the apprenticeship programme that they have put together.

"My apprenticeship created the foundations for me to develop as a person and while it wasn't all plain sailing it gave me the confidence to achieve my goals and be respected as an integral part of what is a very progressive business. When this journey began ten years ago apprenticeships were definitely unfashionable, but with investment from businesses like KMF they are certainly becoming more popular and, when well constructed they provide the opportunities, whichever route through the business you want to take allowed me to develop as a person. That said, I remain extremely ambitious and want to further advance my qualifications in management; and just as KMF provides value added services to its customers it takes that same approach to the people working in the business, by continuing to encourage personal development."

KMF has been taking on four apprentices per year since 2001; over 90% still work for the company. Success is down to the progression and career opportunities that, as a growing business, KMF can provide. In the early years of the programme KMF made full use of external training providers, but during 2006 it made the decision to bring all apprentice training in-house. Jenny Conlon, KMF's Training Centre Manager, explains: "As part of our ongoing commitment towards achieving the highest standards (evident in the investment made in manufacturing technology), we became aware that the content of the practical training provided by the colleges was not sufficient for KMF's needs. This is not a direct criticism of the colleges as they are under resourced and are therefore financially unable to keep up with the pace of technology and therefore, could not provide the specialist training and skills that we need to compete."

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