

Developing staff gives firm edge

MERC ENGINEERING
Barrowford

AS one of East Lancashire's leading aerospace supply companies, Merc Engineering understands the importance of training.

The Barrowford-based company, which builds precision parts for the defence and motorsport industries, is only eight years old but already it has one of the area's most advanced training structures.

And the commitment to training stretches from the top of the company to shop floor workers.

Managing director Les Nuttall recently completed a manufacturing course at Lancaster University.

But others have benefited from the company's attitude to training too, including one staff member who was sponsored to do a business degree at Leeds University.

Meanwhile, shop floor workers have been sent on team leader development courses and the company, which is on course to spend around £25,000 this year on training, shelled out £10,000 to be part of the North West Aerospace Alliance (NWAA) supply chain excellence programme.

Marketing manager Jean-Yves Dziki said: "It has been a Merc strategy to grow the business by taking on the right people and pushing them, because we believe it gives us the edge.

"Signing up to the NWAA scheme is a big investment and a big commitment for us."

Under the NWAA programme, Merc is linked with Burnley-based aerospace firm - and Training and Development award rival - Aircelle to learn from the larger company through



DEDICATED: Apprentice Chris Schofield at work

mentoring.

However, the company is keen to stress that every member of staff is worthy of potentially costly training.

Mr Dziki added: "A lot of our training is done on the shop floor.

"It is all about improving our workforce but it is not

just all about management.

"We know the benefits of training.

"We started in 2001 with 17 employees and our growth since then is linked to training, and we think you also need that expertise to be able to properly manage the growth."



HIGH-FLYERS: Aircelle has a commitment to improving the skills of its entire workforce

AIRCELLE
Burnley

DESPITE scooping the coveted Business of the Year Award at last year's Lancashire Telegraph Business Awards, staff at Aircelle have not rested on their laurels.

In 2008, the Burnley aerospace firm was lauded by judges after it created 250 skilled jobs - and its commitment to improving its 750-strong workforce is evident.

The company makes thrust reversers for clients including Airbus, the type of high-tech work which makes quality training essential.

Among schemes which the company has pioneered in East Lancashire is a skills-based leadership which has been undertaken by 48 managers at its Bancroft Road site.

Two places on the course, sponsored by Aircelle's parent company Safran, were also provided to staff from Cherry Fold Primary School in Burnley and Shuttleworth College in Padiham.

The emphasis is not only on the company's bosses.

Bringing on industry's new blood

Around 30 shop-floor workers have been sponsored on further education courses and others have been taught French and German language skills to deal with Aircelle's European customers.

Human resources director Helen Gopsill said one of the most important areas of training at the company is the apprenticeship scheme, which trains workers who want to become engineers.

It was introduced to address a shortage of younger engineers and there are now around 24 apprentices working at Aircelle.

Miss Gopsill said: "It was

a scheme set up to address a problem.

"We were receiving applications from younger people, but not enough, and now we are flooded by them and that is obviously a much better position."

And she added that the company must remain 100 per cent committed to training to ensure it keeps ahead of the aerospace field.

"Our long-term development relies on us having the skills in place and the resources to grow our own people here," she said.

"That adds another dimension to the company and it's something you cannot understate."

Home to some very satisfied workers



TRAINING: Calico's property market officer Joanne Clegg is part of the team

IN little more than 10 years, housing associations have helped transform social properties into more desirable places to live.

And in the process, Burnley-based Calico has become one of the best places to work in the country, according to national experts.

The achievement, which saw Calico rub shoulders with the likes of Microsoft and Kellogg's in the Sunday Times' Best Places to Work list, is in no small part down to its commitment to training.

Chief executive Mike Birkett believes investing in the company's 280 staff pays dividends, with employees taking fewer sick days than average and most staying at Calico long-term.

And although the statistics

CALICO HOUSING
Burnley

back up the rationale, such investment does not come cheap.

An average Calico employee spends almost six days a year in training, costing the company £400 for each staff member.

Among highly-praised initiatives at the company is an apprentice scheme which sees Calico's building contractors take on young workers for 30 week placements.

Elsewhere, staff are sent to other departments to learn more about the company and what it does in the community, and Calico's interiors team is made up

entirely on trainee painters and decorators. Mr Birkett said: "As a company we have decided to focus the culture of the organisation on putting in place opportunities for staff to learn and develop.

"Our view is that we have got brilliant staff and we must plan to keep them."

That plan also includes a commitment to be flexible with staff and offer job shares, even in some of the company's most senior roles.

Although Calico is not-for-profit, it receives no Government funding and has struggled with private firms through the recession.

Indeed, Mr Birkett said abandoning the company's staff development and training ethos would be "short-sighted".