

CASE STUDY

GROUP LOTUS



to continuously succeed in achieving world-class performance, it must provide its employees with opportunities to realise their potential and capabilities. For manufacturing and its supportive functions, Group Lotus has set in place a dedicated training programme (NVQ Levels 2 and 3 in Business Improvement Techniques (B-IT)) for 300 of its employees. This programme represents a benchmark for the manufacturing industry and helps businesses to achieve and maintain world-class performance standards.

The training programme at Group Lotus has already yielded impressive results. The company's Business 'stretch' performance targets continue to be met. It has been quick to prove its agility by responding to new business opportunities to meet demands for new 'fast to market' product. The NVQ training initiative has fitted in well with the company's new found 'meritocracy' culture – passionately promoted by Group Lotus CEO: Mike Kimberley. This endorses a 'reward for effort' value which employees receive through worthy recognition of achieving this important nationally recognised qualification.

The Skills Academy, City College Norwich and the Learning & Skills Council have had significant enabling roles in supporting Group Lotus. The company has been able to create its own team of the Skills Academy's qualified trainers to deliver NVQ B-IT Levels 2 and 3. The NVQ certificates are awarded by the City & Guilds which Group Lotus employees can use as part of their skills portfolio throughout their career.

The training initiative at Group Lotus stems from the work of its Continuous Improvement and Manufacturing Business Coordination Manager, John Vigar who, together with the Skills Academy, convinced all parties that here was a win/win

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John Vigar
Continuous Improvement and Manufacturing Business Coordination Manager

Group Lotus employs almost 1,000 people around the world and is working with The National Skills Academy for Manufacturing (the Skills Academy) to further improve the skills of its workforce employed at its Hethel Plant in Norfolk.

Group Lotus is renowned for designing and manufacturing world-class niche sports cars which feature lightweight and high performance drive and handling characteristics. The company has a strong heritage of delivering innovation, not only through its exciting products, but also through highly valued engineering and consultancy expertise for the global automotive industry.

In 2005, Group Lotus won the prestigious Manufacturer's 2005 World-class Manufacturing Award of the Year. The company believes that

situation for all concerned. John Vigar's role with Group Lotus is to help bring about positive change through the continuous improvement philosophy. This also includes further developing employees to apply best practices in their job roles, to maintain process control systems and apply standardised work ethics.

Vigar said: "Group Lotus cars are hand built. Without our having automated robotics in our production system the build quality of our products is therefore highly dependent on the skills and abilities of our people.

A company using robots would probably not think twice about upgrading software programmes to improve performance. For Group Lotus to stay at the forefront of world-class manufacturing, it makes perfect sense to me that we must continuously invest in the up-skilling of our workforce. The NVQ B-IT programme is an excellent way of contributing towards that."

The NVQ in B-IT covers Complying with Statutory Regulations & Organisational Safety Requirements, Contributing to Effective Team Working, Applying Workplace Organisation, Applying Continuous Improvement Techniques, Creating Visual Management Systems and Applying Problem Solving Techniques. The aim is to help employees develop an even better understanding of their roles within manufacturing and to further improve quality and other performance measures. This helps unlock employee potential by empowering them and giving them the confidence to make improvements. To further encourage this, the company has allowed staff the time and space to effect and implement their ideas. The Group Lotus training team coaches employees in how best to put business improvement technique theory learnt in the classroom into practice in the employee's own work area. This makes each course very relevant for the learner.

The Skills Academy has helped Group Lotus to select the right training material which is tailored to accommodate Group Lotus needs. The Skills Academy also ensures that the quality and delivery of the courses are of the highest order. The training team at Group Lotus have also become qualified NVQ A1 Assessors as part of the support provided by City College, Norwich.

This has greatly helped to ensure that all the NVQ criteria are fully met and are ready for the City & Guilds verification auditors.

Group Lotus has received over 280 enrolment requests from employees since launching the initiative early in 2007. The first 150 of these have already completed their classroom training, which indicates that the company is well on the way to accomplishing its goal of 300 staff achieving certificates by late summer 2008. Group Lotus intends to cascade its NVQ training initiative into its supply chain – targeting suppliers and contractors which are based in the East of England first.

John Vigar also has a vision of extending the scope for his training team to deliver NVQ and other accredited training even further afield.

