

College: Pontypridd College
Location: Pontypridd, Wales, UNITED KINGDOM
Practice: South Wales Education for Industry Consortium
 Partnering with the aviation industry to meet training needs

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| <i>Year Started</i> | 1998 |
| <i>Budget</i> | £1.3 million (\$1.9 million) |
| <i>Program Participants</i> | 50 |
| <i>College FTE</i> | 3,500 |
| <i>Target Sector</i> | Aerospace |
| <i>Staff Size</i> | 5 FT |
| <i>Structure</i> | Academic and vocational coursework offered through college, with industry input and participation |
| <i>Key Outcomes</i> | Partnerships with industry, the creation of best practices training for industry partners, implementation of variable training solutions and materials to support training |

Introduction

An increasingly common approach to regional development is addressing the training needs of a particular regionally dominant industrial sector or cluster. These efforts are intended to not only improve the performance of the industries that receive assistance but that as those industries improve they will, in turn, purchase more supplies and services from other businesses in the region, thereby creating a ripple effect that benefits the whole region.

The South Wales Education for Industry Consortium (SWEFIC) was created by five local Further Education colleges in the region to do just that. It connects educators, economic developers, and representatives of the region’s important

aviation and aerospace industries. Through SWEFIC, each college works with two industry members to provide the training and services necessary to replenish and maintain a skilled and responsive workforce. Pontypridd College—a member of SWEFIC—works with General Electric and British Airways.

Community Background

The economy of South Wales historically has depended on coal mining. As the coal industry declined, however, regional leaders have sought to attract high technology firms such as electronics and aerospace. As part of the effort, Further Education (FE) colleges in the region (similar to

| Program focus | Sector specific | Economic condition | Economic base | | | Target populations |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|-----|-----|------------------------------------|
| | | | Mfg | Agr | Svc | |
| Technical education | Yes | Growing | N/A | N/A | N/A | Existing workforce, youth/students |

| <i>Service Area</i> | <i>Rhondda, Cynon, and Taff Counties</i> |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Total Population</i> | 240,000 |
| <i>Median Household Income</i> | £340 (\$500) per week |
| <i>% Below Poverty Level</i> | Higher than average |
| <i>% Unemployment Rate</i> | 6.8 |
| <i>% Minority Population</i> | 0.8 |
| <i>% Rural Population</i> | N/A |
| <i>% High School Graduates</i> | N/A |
| <i>% College Graduates</i> | N/A |

community colleges in the U.S.) are developing relationships with the avionics and aerospace industries in order to provide appropriate training. The need for training is critical, particularly amid reports of a looming shortage of skilled workers. In addition to providing the training and initiatives to fill the anticipated shortage, FE colleges are exposing students to career opportunities that are available within their community in those industries.

Program Description

The South Wales Education for Industry Consortium was established in 1998 in response to a consultant's recommendations to tailor coursework to changing industrial needs and incorporate more flexibility into training and educational programs. Funding to create SWEFIC came from the Welsh Education for Industry Initiative and on-going funding comes from the European Union.

SWEFIC involves five FE colleges: Bridgend, Barry, Gwent Tertiary, Glan Hafren and Pontypridd. Each college has as its goal the further development of industry in the region. The consortium's initiatives include technician development, flexible training and education, the use of computer-based training, the use of personal development plans, qualifications training, and curriculum development.

SWEFIC, in cooperation with the South Wales Aerospace Group, matched each aerospace college with its two industry partners. Pontypridd's partners have been General Electric Aircraft Engine Services and British Airways Avionics Engineering, which was based in part on a previous relationship between the college and companies.

Pontypridd College has a long history of providing training for industry. Established in 1960 to provide "alternative education and training opportunities," Pontypridd is a member of the larger further education network of the United Kingdom, whose members specialize in industry-based training and provide certification and qualification in specialized areas. Economic development is an important part of the mission of further education system, and the colleges represent an important building block for regional economies—especially when that economy depends upon an industry for which specialized skills are a prerequisite.

Pontypridd established its connection with British Airways (then BOAC) after its founding in the 1960s. At that time, Pontypridd was already providing apprenticeship training, of both academic and vocational skills, based on the aerospace industry's needs. Pontypridd expanded its investment in this industry in 1993, with construction of the Manufacturing Technology Training Center (MTTC), a facility for aerospace research, development, and training. This facility came about through cooperation between education agencies, local government organizations, and industry.

The foundation for Pontypridd's program lies in its training matrix, developed in cooperation with General Electric. Since General Electric is a leader within the industry, the matrix is broad enough and flexible enough to also fit the needs of British Airways as well as the smaller, more general engineering companies.

The training matrix includes courses in

- Type-specific product theory
- Supplementary skills
- Basic craft skills
- Academic professional development
- Regulatory professional development
- Underpinning knowledge

Course length is variable, but generally runs between one and five days. Training takes place either in a classroom or a practical environment (the company or another suitable site). Exposure to the course material is further expanded through multi-media recording and viewing technology. While the program is open to all, Pontypridd seeks students interested in a career in the aerospace industry.

In addition to the training, the college works

with primary and secondary schools to generate interest in the industry.

To certify its program, the college maintains ties to the Engineering Marine Training Agency, the Aviation Industry Vocational Standards Council, the Aviation Training Association, and the Association of Colleges in Aerospace Training. National Vocational Qualifications specific to the industry are also in development and will add validity to associated programs. The college now is seeking approval under the Joint Aviation Requirement (JAR147), which would be a substantial accreditation to receive.

Outcomes

SWEFIC trained 16 students in four companies during its first year of operation. Among its other achievements are its partnerships with industry, the creation of best practices training for industry partners, the implementation of variable training solutions, the development of materials to support training programs (including distance learning resources), and the development of Personal Development Plans for participants in the aerospace and automotive manufacturing industry.

Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability

SWEFIC strengths clearly lie in its customized partnership with industry, which pools resources and knowledge. As one participant stated, the program is innovative because it “brings together different parts of the industry to push the training forward. The school reacts to what we the industry want, not what the school wants to teach.” Another participant agreed: “What they’re good at is, rather than putting students through set training programs, they’ve developed customized training that is flexible and meets our specific needs.” Because the college is responding to what local industry needs and wants, local industry has good reason to stay and continue to invest back into the community.

The biggest challenge for the program is coping with the ever-changing nature of the industry, including technology, financial constraints, and attitudes—both of the community and of those involved with SWEFIC.

The aerospace program at Pontypridd is one of

five industry-specific programs taking place across southern Wales. Though there is nothing else quite like it in either the UK or the European Union, any college with close ties to local industry and an interest in creating a consortium with other institutions could find success in the replication of this program.

For more information, contact:

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