



Towards 2010: Pilot Drilling Controls

EEDA helps a precision engineering company move towards the future with subsidised and targeted skills training

Summary

A subsidised training initiative jointly funded by EEDA has helped Pilot Drilling Controls Ltd (PDC) to improve its performance. With analysis and assistance from Towards 2010, PDC identified the skills that it most needed, and constructed a programme to acquire them.

County:	Suffolk
EEDA theme:	Business Support
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Main messages

- EEDA-funded initiative helps companies identify training to improve their performance
- Companies are refunded a significant proportion of the cost of the training
- The initiative is simple to access and well managed
- Towards 2010 is now followed by Beyond 2010, a £6.2 million investment for subsidised skills training across the region

Case study

Learning the skills to succeed

Anne Swietlik is feeling optimistic: “I’ve had director’s training and training for performance management – and I think it’s made me much more effective within my role in the company.”

She is company secretary of Pilot Drilling Control (PDC), a medium-sized business that designs and manufactures precision machinery, with a focus on drilling technology in the



offshore oil and gas industry. Although PDC won a prestigious engineering innovation award this year at the Offshore Technology Conference in Houston, Texas, it knows it has to work hard to maintain its position. That is why PDC decided to carry out a company-wide skills upgrade, incorporating everything from welding and machine programming to business leadership.

Anne and her colleagues were able to benefit significantly from this training because of Towards 2010, an initiative run by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) with the goal of making the region one of Europe's 20 most prosperous. The initiative offers employers a significant contribution towards the cost of any critical training that improves a business's performance.

"The Towards 2010 training has definitely helped to underpin the success of our business," said Anne. "Nothing's been more important than the awareness training – it put what we all do into context. One of our biggest customers is Sii Neyrfor, a global offshore technology business with a base in Aberdeen. Without the awareness training, PDC wouldn't have been able to understand Smith's needs and demands – and respond as a group."

As well as the Towards 2010 training itself, Anne values the connections that it has helped her to make. She now has closer ties with Lowestoft College, whose facility for offshore technology training has been made available to PDC's technical apprentices. She has also networked with other people in her industry: "On the performance-management course I found myself with people who worked in the area but hadn't met before. We were able to discuss the fact that we had the same sort of frustrations and skill shortages."

The networking has helped to improve motivation. Anne said: "Towards 2010 has helped to drive home just how vital the energy industry is to the region. The challenge is plain – we should be clawing back the business that is out there for the taking."

Businesses lead the way

In all, PDC received £10,000 from Towards 2010. The initiative, which began in November 2005, had funding of £4 million from EEDA and the European Social Fund. Around £600,000 of that was allocated to the energy sector, and distributed by the East of England Energy Group (EEEGR), the region's energy-industry association.

The assistance isn't only financial: PDC, like all eligible companies, benefited from analysis and advice that helped to identify the skills that were most needed and the best training

providers for the job. The company also had support as it went through the various parts of the training programme it had devised.

Yet despite the amount of support provided, Towards 2010 was easy to access, as Johnathan Reynolds, EEEGR's general manager, explained. "The company only had to demonstrate that the training they wanted was critical to their business – which it was. If PDC hadn't received that training, their business couldn't have developed the way it has."

The philosophy is simple. "Towards 2010 was business-led," said Johnathan. "Businesses told us what training they wanted and who they wanted to do it with. An accredited person made sure the training was fit for purpose, and EEEGR signed it off. It's rigorous and it cut through the bureaucracy traditionally associated with public funding. The paperwork involved was very straightforward."

Over three years, Towards 2010 assisted nearly 2,400 businesses to train over 8,800 of their staff in areas that would make a tangible difference to business performance. Towards 2010 has now been followed by a new round of EEDA funding called Beyond 2010. Combined with funding from the European Social Fund, the £6.2 million investment in Beyond 2010 offers businesses up to half the cost of training. For further details of Beyond 2010 and other publicly-funded business support, visit the Business Map at www.bizmapeast.co.uk

Conclusion

PDC is just one of the many companies whose performance has improved as a result of EEDA's Towards 2010 initiative. Thanks to the subsidised, precisely targeted training from Towards 2010 and now through Beyond 2010, businesses are benefiting hugely from their employees' improved skills. As a result, they are contributing more to the region's economy.

Financial facts and figures

- EEDA made £600,000 of grant funding available towards training for the East of England's energy sector under Towards 2010
- PDC received £10,000 from Towards 2010
- Towards 2010 had a total budget of £4 million
- Beyond 2010, the follow-up to Towards 2010, is a £6.2 million investment by EEDA and the European Social Fund.

Contact details

Subject of case study:	Anne Swietlik, PDC Email: anne2@pdc-uk.com Tel: 01502 588422
EEDA executives:	David Wall, EEDA Email: davidwall@eeda.org.uk Tel: 01223 713900