

Partnerships in practice

dti

The DTI drives our ambition of 'prosperity for all' by working to create the best environment for business success in the UK. We help people and companies become more productive by promoting enterprise, innovation and creativity.

We champion UK business at home and abroad. We invest heavily in world-class science and technology. We protect the rights of working people and consumers. And we stand up for fair and open markets in the UK, Europe and the world.

Employee partnership simply means employers and employees working together. It involves good communication between employers and employees, so that employees know and understand the business's objectives and can contribute to important developments. Greater employee involvement is beneficial for a business, as it makes maximum use of employees' talents and abilities.

Partnership at work can also help to address specific employment or business issues, including absenteeism, productivity, staff turnover, customer satisfaction levels and management of flexible working practices. Making partnership a core element of your organisation is a good way of creating a happier and more productive workforce.

This brochure looks at partnership at work and shows examples of case studies of companies that have forged successful partnerships with their own employees.

This brochure is for: Any business that wants to improve its performance and competitiveness through partnership working.

It covers: How you can benefit by creating a culture of openness and communication, internally and externally.

Achieving best practice in your business is a key theme within DTI's approach to business support solutions, providing ideas and insights into how you can improve performance across your business. By showing what works in other businesses, we can help you see what can help you, and then support you in implementation. This brochure focuses on these solutions.

THE LAW

In March 2005 the European Directive on Information and Consultation will come into force in the UK. It will give employees new rights to be informed and consulted with on a number of issues, including the business's economic situation, employment prospects, and decisions likely to lead to substantial changes in work organisation or contractual relations.

Initially this will affect organisations of 150 employees or more. The legislation will be extended to organisations of 100 employees or more in 2007, and 50 employees or more in 2008.

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Barclays Bank

Sector: Financial Services

Size of firm: 70,000 employees

Location: Nationwide

Website: www.barclays.com & www.unifi.org.uk

The end of the 1990s saw fractious management-employee relations and significant restructuring at Barclays Bank, one of the world's largest banking institutions.

In 2000, Barclays and financial industry trade union, UNIFI, agreed a set of Partnership Principles aimed at improving industrial relations and creating a culture of mutual understanding. The formation of a top-level Partnership Steering Group, although a positive first step, was seen as only the beginning of a long process to embed partnership from the top to the ground-level of the company.

"A partnership culture needs time to grow," said Jim Lowe, UNIFI National Secretary. "People cannot be compelled to work in partnership – they need to be encouraged and supported at every level of both the union and the company."

To achieve this goal, a network of local UNIFI representatives was installed at pilot Barclays branches, where a joint development course with branch managers was initiated, to educate both parties on using partnership principles.

The course focused on managers and union representatives working together to solve specific workplace issues and suggesting ideas to raise awareness of the new process at branch level.

Nigel Fretwell, Employee Relations Director at Barclays, said: "As this programme rolls out during 2004, it's still early days for quantifiable results."

"The recent agreement of two three-year pay deals using joint union-management problem solving principles, indicates that partnership delivers tangible benefits to both partners."

Nigel Fretwell, Employee Relations Director, Barclays

Call Centre Partnership

Sector: Call Centre Services

Size of firm: 15,000 employees represented

Location: Liverpool

Website: www.gcolwynsmith.co.uk

The call centre industry, with its high sickness, absence and turnover rates, has been searching for best practice guidelines.

A partnership was set up by the North West TUC, the Liverpool and Knowsley environmental health departments, Health@Work and the Merseyside Contact Centre Forum, to encourage and reinforce internal partnerships between staff at all levels in call centres.

In addition, the scheme forms an external partnership between the call centres, its stakeholders and enforcement bodies.

Training courses and networking events, along with an e-library for partners giving examples of best practice, have also enabled call centre operators to realise that improved employee involvement has a direct impact on increased productivity.

Workshops addressing conflict resolution between staff and management, and the development of partnership arrangements, have shown evidence of smoother transitions in change situations such as business expansion and acquisition.

For group member Consus Integrated Communications, the concept of moving day-to-day health and safety responsibility from management to floor staff has proved highly successful. Workers are motivated to take a genuine interest in first aid and health and safety issues, and are willing to raise concerns over issues about their working environment.

Thanks to these partnership principles, there is a reduced need for temporary staff to cover absenteeism. Improved recruitment practices, greater investment in training and a healthier working environment are all additional benefits.

“The number of project partners has more than trebled during the project, and still more organisations are interested in joining the group. Partnership at work offers the best way to improve health, safety and productivity.”

Godfrey Smith, Project Leader, Facilitator, Merseyside Call Centre Partnership

Diageo Global Supply

Sector: FMCG – alcoholic drinks

Size of firm: 4,000 employees

Location: Scotland

Website: www.diageo.com

Manufacturer and supplier of brands such as Guinness, Smirnoff, Bell's and Johnnie Walker, Diageo Global Supply in Scotland has successfully developed a new employee relations philosophy following a fractious period of late 90s change involving a major corporate merger.

Although a partnership agreement already existed as far back as 1994, the company recognised that business planning and restructuring had lost sight of the 'human element', demonstrated by the seven months it took to reach a satisfactory pay deal in 2000.

Prompted by a successful application for DTI support matched by company investment, Diageo agreed an updated partnership programme in 2000 between management and trade unions GMB, Amicus (AEEU and MSF) and T&GWU. The programme focused on four areas – business understanding, partnership development, communication skills and joint issue resolution.

In true partnership fashion, a series of two-hour 'toolkit' style training modules were devised and delivered to colleagues by the employees themselves, along with their line managers.

Following 'train the trainer' sessions, there are now over 60 employees who train using the course modules, explaining how each part of the organisation works – financially as well as operationally. This inter-departmental cross-pollination of ideas also demonstrates how actions impact on other departments and the business as a whole.

This new philosophy, along with clearly defined upward channels of communication through localised consultative committees, has given employees a better understanding of the business and opportunities to be heard on local site issues.

"The first tabled offer to final balloted agreement took only two weeks instead of seven months. That is a testimony to the efforts of the trade unions and management alike."

**Ruth Minnican, Employee Relations
Communications Manager, Diageo**

Ethel Austin

Sector: Clothing retailer

Size of firm: 2,300 employees

Location: Liverpool

Discount clothing retailer Ethel Austin Ltd, has proactively managed relations through a period of dramatic growth and a change of ownership, using a new partnership initiative involving staff and unions.

The company focused on its distribution centre, which supports more than 260 stores across the country and employs 10 per cent of the company's total workforce. The aim of the project was to increase productivity and profitability by improving employee satisfaction and reducing absenteeism.

Ethel Austin promoted an improvement culture through dialogue and individual ownership of shared objectives, and by communicating its goals through a series of workshops for managers, employees and USDAW union shop stewards.

With falling distribution centre absenteeism creating greater efficiency, Mark Thompson, Head of Human Resources, attributed the success to partnership. "We realised that to support our new trading strategy, we needed to adopt a 'people approach' to promote a sense of company pride," he said.

To achieve this aim and to make individuals feel an important part of the team, staff are now involved in the induction process of new recruits. They are also encouraged to make decisions related to their own working environment, including helping to set and manage their own budgets for workplace improvement.

USDAW Area Organiser Nick Gerard said: "In the past, only union representatives would have been involved in the communication process. This has given them a greater understanding of the business and the important part they play in its success."

This programme, combined with other operational developments, has seen Ethel Austin's operating profits leap by more than 150%, generating the reputation of a 'rising star of retail' among industry analysts.

The Restaurant Association and the Hospitality Training Foundation

Sector: Tourism

Size of firm: 1,000 employees represented

Location: UK-wide

Website: www.bha-online.org.uk

Concerns have been growing in recent years about the tourism and hospitality industry's poor record for service and hygiene standards. And, when it's responsible for generating £74 billion for the economy and employing 7% of the nation's workforce, this is clearly a big problem.

Addressing the need for food handling best practice, the Restaurant Association and the Hospitality Training Foundation has created a training module as part of its 'Food Safety Partnerships at Work' development programme.

The aim is to increase food safety in the industry through partnership action between employers and employees. The training programme is available to staff working in kitchens and dining rooms across the hospitality industry.

Complete with an easy-to-use workbook, also available on CD-Rom, the four-hour programme is designed as a learning experience to heighten food safety awareness and promote shared responsibility for good hygiene between staff and management.

According to David Harrold, Director of the Restaurant Association, the inclusion of a certificate for successfully completing the course boosts the self-esteem of those who otherwise may rarely receive recognition or encouragement – let alone training.

Lynne Ratcliffe of Manchester United FC Catering now includes the training as part of the induction for new recruits. "This programme is ideal as it allows us to deliver training in bite-sized chunks to new staff on the premises," she said.

The training programme complements other formal qualifications, and its easily absorbed format can enhance in-house training sessions and support supervisor-staff teambuilding exercises.

The course is already in use at over a hundred establishments in the UK, and The Restaurant Association and the Hospitality Training Foundation now plan to roll out the initiative, creating a further 500 Food Safety Partnerships (FSPs) involving 2,500 employees in its second year and 1,000 FSPs involving 5,000 employees in year three.

Glass Manufacturers

Sector: National Training Organisation

Size of firm: 4-500 companies represented

Location: Sheffield

Website: www.bibby-sterilin.co.uk www.allied-glass.com

The glass industry is using partnerships to enhance individual skills' development.

Four major glass manufacturers (Allied Glass Containers, S.Murray & Co, FBG Anchor, and Bibby Sterilin) have partnered with Glass Training Ltd. Employees from these companies have completed NVQs in areas such as management, manufacturing, customer service and health and safety.

At Bibby Sterilin shop floor employees are trained as facilitators for an efficiency initiative called Five-S (Sweep, Shine, Set, Standardise and Sustain). Empowering staff to choose and analyse aspects of their own work, the initiative allows them to make their own improvements for a safer and more efficient working life.

Bibby Sterilin's General Manager of Manufacturing, Mike Bratt, said: "The Five-S programme has an important team-building element as employees at all levels work together in steering groups, and training and development teams, to take ownership of their own zone's efficiency."

This partnership programme not only involves employees in the company's direction – there are also operational benefits. A 50% reduction in scrap wastage has created significant cost savings, shortened turnaround times and improved product quality for customers.

David Arrowsmith, T&GWU Senior Shop Steward, said: "The working environment is now safer, cleaner and more pleasant for the workforce. This programme also means that management can measure and recognise an individual's improvement efforts – and recognition is always good for morale."

John Heathcoat & Co Ltd

Sector: Textiles

Size of firm: 450 employees

Location: Devon

Website: www.heathcoat.co.uk

Textile company John Heathcoat & Co Ltd improved customer service by opening up departmental and job description barriers to encourage an atmosphere of openness and co-operation.

The company was already a keen supporter of partnership management principles, and its overall aim was to further develop an environment of continuous improvement by empowering staff to take ownership of organisational issues. In doing so, the company is now actively improving many areas of business, including delivery times and customer satisfaction rates.

By promoting a culture of co-operation, inter-departmental communication has improved and restrictive job description barriers have been removed – a true achievement in an industry with a tendency to cling to past industrial traditions. Using a joint consultative committee as the main point of feedback has created shared ownership of challenges among staff and management.

Old-style induction days have been replaced by a new business awareness programme for all staff members – even experienced employees. This includes a training programme of in-house presentations and cross-departmental tours. The programme was developed with employee input and allows staff to understand and care about how their work affects other departments and overall business performance.

Customer complaints have reduced by 50%, well above an initial target of 33%.

Personnel Manager, Nicola Green said: “Employees now enjoy the opportunity to visit other areas of the business which they would not normally see.”

The employee business awareness drive in October 2002, was part of a DTI-supported update to the company’s existing partnership programme.

“Feedback has shown an increased feeling of pride in our products and a greater awareness of customer needs.”

**Nicola Green, Personnel Manager,
John Heathcoat & Co.**

Legal & General

Sector: Financial Services

Size of firm: 8,000 employees

Location: Nationwide

Website: www.legal-and-general.co.uk www.amicustheunion.org

Legal & General has formed a partnership with trade union Amicus to develop an open culture of consultation.

The new culture is based on complete openness between both organisations, the union now joins discussions on employment and business related issues.

A 'partnership day' took place in November 2002 to raise awareness of the relationship. The original partnership agreement was actually signed in 1997, but both Amicus and Legal & General agreed that it needed more attention. An action plan was launched under the title 'Strategy and Leadership', extending the scope of the Partnership Agreement. The new programme, supported by the DTI for twelve months, formed the basis of a sustained approach to co-operation between management, employees and their union.

A partnership training programme was set up and attended by 130 company managers, HR advisers and union representatives. The programme was supported by internal communications with information appearing in internal magazines and intranet sites. This innovative approach also attracted national press coverage.

The partnership approach means that the union, and through them the employees, are aware of major business issues such as potential mergers and acquisitions. Joint employer-employee committees also have access to evaluate pay data for employees.

This open environment has established a partnership mindset throughout the organisation. Line managers are encouraged to regularly discuss significant work practice changes with their teams and Amicus before implementing them, while accepting challenges to these decisions with an open mind.

The drive has also delivered tangible results with staff turnover reduced by over 5%.

London Borough of Merton

Sector: Public Sector

Size of firm: 5,000 employees

Location: London

Website: www.merton.gov.uk

The London Borough of Merton has developed a partnership programme to specifically address race equality issues within the workplace, in response to the issues arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

The project was set up to target issues relating to prejudice, perceptions and attitudes to race and ethnic background.

It focused on language, self-awareness, cultural awareness, communication and behavioural skills.

The programme has been running since 2001 and sees the council's staff contribute ideas towards a new Equality and Diversity policy. Training workshops have included techniques such as live drama to change attitudes and develop effective communication against a backdrop of cultural diversity.

Promoting equal opportunity through such training events and seminars has sparked a number of innovations, where the employees themselves have taken the opportunity to create their own initiatives.

One example is the new Merton Ethnic Minority Staff Network, which regularly contributes to recruitment and diversity awareness issues. The group has also held a lunchtime cultural event for 150 staff members, featuring international music, dance and food-tasting with information about different religions on display.

Other multi-cultural resources have also been developed, such as a multi-faith prayer room, and religious and cultural awareness guidance, encouraging employees to proactively build better working relationships.

But it has not just been within the organisation that these changes have been noticed. Research among local residents has shown a marked increase in the feeling that the council tackles discrimination. There has also been a 100% increase in the number of Social Services clients who said that race, culture or religious matters are given due consideration.

NCR Business Solutions

Sector: IT

Size of firm: 1,500 employees

Location: Dundee

Website: www.ncr.com

A global American corporation with a core manufacturing site in Dundee, NCR Business Solutions considers positive relationship-building with employees and trade unions key to its success in a fiercely competitive market.

A partnership programme has been in place for two years, and continues to focus on improving communications and involving employees in joint problem-solving. Behavioural and technical training courses have been a key factor in the programme's success.

The opening in 2003 of a new research and development base, called the 'Discover Centre', is one example of this success. Not only were 500 employees involved in making decisions, but they were able to design their own working areas to create an efficient working environment.

As a result of the partnership programme, employees are now more aware of their role in reducing manufacturing costs through adherence to quality and meeting customer demands. This has contributed towards NCR's accreditation of Class 'A' manufacturing efficiency levels in August 2003, in its drive to achieve World Class manufacturing status. In 2003 the company also achieved 38th place in the Financial Times published 50 Best Workplaces in the UK.

The company's dedicated approach to partnership has resulted in greatly improved stakeholder communications. Employees contribute more through greater awareness, and the 2% reduction in absenteeism within just twelve months has created considerable cost savings.

"Partnership is one of the main elements ensuring that the company has empathy with staff needs and that all employees are ever-mindful of business deliverables. It's not just a new scheme – it's the way we've all chosen to work."

**Peter Denheen, HR Director,
NCR Business Solutions**

PizzaExpress

Sector: Leisure – restaurant

Size of firm: 5,000 employees

Location: UK-wide

Website: www.pizzaexpress.com

The 1990s was a time of phenomenal growth for restaurant-chain PizzaExpress. It developed from a relatively modest collection of franchise operations in the mid-90s to a household name with 5,000 employees in 1998.

To prevent decision-making becoming too remote from the shop floor, a working group from a wide cross-section of the business was formed to develop a two-way internal communication system.

The group started an employee forum in the summer of 2003 which mirrored the branch, area, regional and national structure of the company. A restaurant staff member became forum co-ordinator.

Non-managerial forum representatives were elected to sit on each level of the forum and employees, who had the opportunity to have their say on management decisions, reported significant improvements throughout the organisation as a result.

Issues such as payslip information and services charges were addressed and a 'green committee' set up to look at environment issues.

To keep employees informed of plans at board level, the company created two formats of its report, 'Management News', one an in-depth version for managers, the other a noticeboard summary informing staff of management issues and decisions.

This open 'listening' style has greatly improved employee self-esteem and morale through recent years. The company's new owners, Gondola Express, who took over in 2003, plan for continuous improvement into the future.

In the same vein, Staff Representative Ivano Knight said that partnership had enhanced employees' self-esteem because management was listening to them and allowing them to be involved in the issues.

Proper Cornish

Sector: Food Manufacturing

Size of firm: 165 employees

Location: Bodmin

Website: www.propercornish.co.uk

Cornwall-based pastry manufacturer Proper Cornish Ltd shows how an SME can use partnership principles to solve absenteeism and high staff turnover to improve growth potential.

With recruitment, retention and absenteeism forming the main focus of its partnership programme, the company established communication groups among its 165 employees and directors to discuss problems and find suitable solutions together. Issues ranged from strategic areas, including pay and performance measurement, to working conditions such as improving changing and recreation facilities.

The simple act of providing efficient communication channels has largely eradicated the negative 'them and us' culture, allowing all staff to have a say in how the business operates.

As a mark of the company's progress, it achieved its Investors in People accreditation and now uses the key indicators of the award within a regular staff 'health check' survey to keep the programme on track.

These positive moves have had dramatic effects on the business. Staff turnover has been cut by over a half and overall productivity has increased from 89% to 98%.

To allow senior management to measure the effects of the programme, performance indicators are plotted and then converted into financial savings. For example, absenteeism falling from 18% to an average of 7% leads to an increase of standard working hour production, which equates to 46,000 pasties per week – equivalent to £3,000 per week of savings in overtime payments alone.

HR Manager, Dave Read, said: "Now, as absence rates have come down and recruitment is proving easier, working hours are shorter – which pleases everyone."

"Before the project, we had high rates of absence and a disgruntled workforce. Staff were forced to work long hours to cope with peaks in demand."

Dave Read, HR Manager, Proper Cornish Ltd

Royal College of Midwives

Sector: Professional Body

Size of firm: 33,000 employees

Location: London

Website: www.rcm.org.uk

Knowing the full extent of a problem is the first step towards solving it, as the Royal College of Midwives found when it commissioned a nationwide survey investigating staff recruitment and retention issues within the profession.

Falling numbers in recent years has left the remaining 33,000 midwives across 300 maternity units in the UK under increasing pressure.

But the survey identified maternity units that had already implemented innovative and successful 'partnership' style approaches to recruitment, from which useful good employment practice guides have been developed.

The guides, 'Working Better Together' and, in co-operation with Daycare Trust, 'Delivering Better Working Lives Together', were distributed to NHS managers and union stewards throughout the country. They now form a framework for employment relations best practice and essential reference guides throughout the profession.

Initially running from January 2001 to March 2003, the project has generated a number of ongoing programmes at individual hospitals.

A midwife-retention programme at Addesbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge involved extensive staff consultation to prioritise staff retention over recruitment, using feedback from staff and involving them in decision-making. Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals convened a working group, which set up initiatives such as providing access to midwifery training for maternity care assistants. Other examples included imaginative programmes for undertaking long-term cultural change at Homerton Hospital in Hackney, for tackling racial discrimination at the Mayday Hospital in Croydon, and for reducing stress at work at the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Trust.

Although measurable changes throughout the industry are not expected overnight, it is believed that momentum is gathering as a result of the project.

S&A Foods

Sector: Food manufacturing

Size of firm: 650 employees

Location: Derby

Website: www.sa-foods.co.uk

When Derby-based S&A Foods combined trade union recognition with a new partnership programme, little did it know just how useful this pre-emptive initiative would be in the near future.

The company, which employs 1,000 staff to produce international ready meals, launched its partnership programme in March 2002, with the aim of improving working relationships between management and workers with their new trade union, T&GWU.

The foundation for the initiative was a joint statement of intent, which outlined the aspirations of both parties. A programme was put in place to build the partnership and develop joint understanding and commitment.

Senior managers and full-time union officials outlined the objectives for the new relationship. The company then elected 17 shop stewards, training them alongside managers in the trade union's role. This new culture of honest and open discussion has made change easier to manage through greater staff involvement and understanding of business issues.

As a result of the partnership programme, staff turnover dropped from 40% to 10%, grievances halved and productivity increased by over 15% with significant associated cost savings.

However, in June 2003, a major contract loss led to a number of redundancies across the company – a setback that had to be managed carefully.

According to Human Resources Manager, Shane Sweeney, this is where an up-and-running partnership programme paid off. "Partnership is fine when the going's good. But the true test really comes when the chips are down," he said. "The whole process, although difficult, was handled sensitively and constructively by both partners. The union's co-operation counted immeasurably towards resolving problems."

The company's resilience, due to stronger working relationships, has led to a 30% replacement of lost business within six months, while strong interest in new products bodes well for the future.

Sainsbury's

Sector: Retail

Size of firm: 6,000 employees

Location: UK

Website: www.sainsburys.com

At Sainsbury's, partnership ensures that the vital behind-the-scenes work at the supermarket chain's busy supply and distribution centres run smoothly.

The nationwide chain launched its partnership programme in 2001, to address an increasingly challenging environment at its depots. That programme has since developed management and trade union relations and saved the company millions of pounds.

Sainsbury's now run weekly 'Exploring Partnership' workshops, in which action teams comprising of staff and management representatives find solutions to various workplace issues – such as setting up new shift patterns, signage policies and line-painting – for greater workflow efficiency. In one instance, a departmental restructuring made savings of £26,000 with partnership co-operation.

A new National Partnership Group, consisting of a manager and a union representative from every depot, has been installed with far-reaching results. There is now a national Health and Safety group comprising staff, management and trade union representatives, and a lifelong learning policy has also been introduced, all contributing to improved morale and a dramatic improvement in performance.

One of the biggest challenges has been the redevelopment of a main distribution centre at Rye Park. The project, in danger of running nine months overdue at a cost of £1m per month, was saved through the joint decision to use part of the new Waltham Point fulfilment factory to get the building work back on schedule.

"This would have been fraught with difficulty but for the new partnership relationship, which helped the transfer by bringing colleagues into the decision-making loop and creating a smooth transition period," said Employee Relations Manager, Jane Fenwick.

Thames Water Utilities

Sector: Utility Service

Size of firm: 4,500 employees

Location: Reading

Website: www.thames-water.com

Workers at Thames Water Utilities Ltd are now more involved than ever in decisions affecting their day-to-day jobs, after a partnership agreement between the company and trade unions UNISON, GMB, Amicus and TGWU in 2000.

Thames Water actively promotes union membership among its employees, with the aim of embedding sustainable and measurable partnership processes throughout the company. To this end, it has initiated a behavioural development training course to improve relations between managers, staff and union representatives.

Called Partnership in Progress (PiP), the programme highlights improvements needed in communication, structure and processes, measuring effectiveness, induction and training, representation issues and culture development.

Issues addressed under the partnership programme include a complete review of shift working terms and conditions – historically a sensitive area that proved difficult to manage.

In this case, the joint management and trade union partnership team formulated proposals and gained overwhelming ballot agreement within four months. As a result, not only did staff benefit from work-life balance improvements and shift pattern choices at local level, but the company also achieved savings of over £500,000.

Having greatly improved employee participation, Thames Water's aim is to make PiP an integral part of the business. There are now a number of project groups drawn from 40 staff, managers and union representatives, which are designing and implementing ways for partnership to be further embedded in the day-to-day business.

Forward thinking companies such as Thames Water Utilities are coming to understand that involving staff in decision-making is not an unnecessary burden. "It leads to a motivated workforce with good ideas for the future," say UNISON Branch Secretary, Bob Levi.

"It leads to a motivated workforce with good ideas for the future."

**Bob Levi, Unison Branch Secretary,
Thames Water Utilities**

The Society of British Aerospace Companies

Sector: Aerospace

Size of firm: 117,000 direct workforce in UK industry

Location: London

Website: www.sbac.co.uk & www.amicustheunion.org

A global study into strategic partnerships is underway which will help the UK retain its prime position in the world aerospace market.

The DTI-supported study is being carried out by trade union Amicus–AEEU and the Society of British Aerospace Companies (SBAC). It will focus on skills and careers promotion, technology and finance issues, manufacturing best practice, skills retention, and supply chain issues.

The project team is investigating examples of how the world’s most successful aerospace nations have developed strategic partnerships and best practice to address these issues. The aim of this is to investigate the cultural underpinnings of partnership and to benchmark specific uses of this process for the benefit of the UK aerospace industry.

Tom Gunner, Government Relations Manager at SBAC said: “In the past, much partnership thinking has focused on workplace practices and industrial relations.”

The project has already identified a number of overseas schemes using partnership principles to great advantage, such as The Technology Partnership, Canada; the US Rocketry Challenge; and the Canadian Workshare Scheme – all working examples of great potential relevance to the development of UK aerospace.

Due to be released in 2004, the report will include case studies and action points for an industry-wide dissemination strategy through regional workshops, with a showcase event at the 2004 Farnborough International Air Show in July.

“This ‘strategic’ partnership project is much broader in scope, looking at the co-ordinated engagement of the various stakeholders that contribute to the success of an entire industry.”

Tom Gunner, Government Relations Manager, SBAC

Westinghouse UK Fuel Business

Sector: Manufacturing – Power Industry

Size of firm: 1,550 employees represented

Location: Preston

Website: www.bnfl.com

Proving that partnership is far from a new business idea, Westinghouse UK Fuel Business, part of BNFL, has embraced the principles at its Springfields site for over ten years – and seen a number of long-term benefits.

With over 1,500 employees, the company's simple partnership philosophy of 'working together for mutual benefit' has extended to include health and safety, site transformation, performance management, total productive manufacturing and a fully embedded learning agenda. The most significant impact on business performance has come from the application of behavioural, skills training, which has been utilised to underpin the Springfields partnership culture.

Instigated by the trade unions and later adopted by management, the behavioural training focuses on self-awareness, motivation and the impact of change on the individual.

The results have been dramatic. The number of employee grievances has dropped from more than 20 a year to zero; there have been no workplace disputes since 2001; and employees are working fewer hours, enjoying significantly higher pensionable pay and improving productivity.

Safety, too, has improved. From 56 lost-time accidents in 1990 there were none in 2000, while absenteeism has dropped from an average of ten days a year in 1999 to 7.6 days in 2003.

In addition, the introduction of annualised hours has eliminated overtime and made a significant contribution to cost savings – yet hardly anyone has had to use their 'banked' hours.

A recent survey carried out by Dick Anyon, Amicus-AEEU trade union convenor at Westinghouse, has demonstrated tremendous support for partnership at Springfields. Some 98% of those surveyed were aware of partnership and 79% found it successful – a quarter of whom suggested further improvements.

"We could go on and on about our achievements, but that would risk complacency. Rather than just a finite 'programme', partnership is an ongoing process which requires constant review and development."

Allan White, Human Resources Adviser, Westinghouse UK Fuel

Further help and advice

Achieving best practice in your business is a key theme within DTI's approach to business support solutions, providing ideas and insights into how you can improve performance across your business. By showing what works in other businesses, we can help you see what can help you, and then support you in implementation.

ACHIEVING BEST PRACTICE IN YOUR BUSINESS

To access free information and publications on best practice:

- visit our website at www.dti.gov.uk/bestpractice
- call the DTI Publications Orderline on 0870 150 2500 or visit www.dti.gov.uk/publications

SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT BEST BUSINESS PRACTICE

To get help bringing best practice to your business, contact Business Link – the national business advice service. Backed by the DTI, Business Link is an easy-to-use business support and information service, which can put you in touch with one of its network of experienced business advisers.

- Visit the Business Link website at www.businesslink.gov.uk
- Call Business Link on 0845 600 9 006

FURTHER INFORMATION ON PARTNERSHIPS

Forming good relationships is vital for the health of any business. To find out more visit the following websites.

www.acas.org.uk/a_z/comms_consultation.html

This site gives advice on employee communications and consultation as well as advice on how to communicate with trade unions.

www.dti.gov.uk/partnershipfund/index.html

This DTI site offers advice regarding the relationship between employers, employees and their representatives. As well as links to related sites and funding information.

Partnerships are not limited to employer and staff, and company and trade union. Dynamic partnerships can be made with other businesses and organisations.

The following sites give examples of other kinds of partnerships:

www.localpartners.org.uk

This site helps business people understand and comply with regulations, thereby making local authorities' enforcement of regulations easier. It also acts as a discussion forum to help businesses to influence how regulations are carried out in their area.

www.aandb.org.uk

Offers businesses the opportunity to make partnerships in the art world.

GENERAL BUSINESS ADVICE

You can also get a range of general business advice from the following organisations:

England

- Call Business Link on 0845 600 9 006
- Visit the website at www.businesslink.gov.uk

Scotland

- Call Business Gateway on 0845 609 6611
- Visit the website at www.bgateway.com

Wales

- Call Business Eye/Llygad Busnes on 08457 96 97 98
- Visit the website at www.busesseye.org.uk

Northern Ireland

- Call Invest Northern Ireland on 028 9023 9090
- Visit the website at www.investni.com

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