

EXCITING NEW SEMBCORP SCHEME SET TO CREATE 200 NEW APPRENTICESHIP AND GRADUATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OVER NEXT THREE YEARS



UK Business Secretary Vince Cable (second right) chats to Ross Garside, left, former TVPT apprentice and now a Sembcorp Shift Operations Technician at the launch of the Sembcorp Skills Development Programme event watched by (left to right) Redcar MP Ian Swales and Sembcorp Senior Vice Presidents George Ritchie and Jane Atkinson.

The Rt Hon Vince Cable, the UK Business Secretary, has launched an innovative new scheme providing the first steps towards solid careers for an additional 200 young people in the Tees Valley and beyond, including the youth unemployed.

The Sembcorp Skills Development Programme (SSDP) is a new apprenticeship and graduate training initiative aimed at 16-24-year-olds.

Led by Sembcorp Utilities UK and supported by some of the biggest names in process industry manufacturing, SSDP will make it easier for small and medium sized firms in the sector's vitally important supply chain to take on apprentices and graduates.

For the first time it will also include training aimed at giving young people who qualify the skills they need to compete for an apprenticeship.

Using £3.4 million of public money made available under the Government's Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot (EOP), employers supporting SSDP include: Wilton-based Sembcorp, SABIC UK Petrochemicals, Huntsman Polyurethanes, CPI and Lotte Chemical along with Chemoxy International in Middlesbrough, Lucite International and Fujifilm Diosynth Biotechnologies at Billingham, Aesica Pharmaceuticals in Cramlington, High Force Research in Durham, Fine Organics and Epax Pharma at Seal Sands and Exwold Technology and Huntsman Tioxide at Greatham, near Hartlepool.

SSDP will help address the anticipated skills shortage within industry and will be managed by Sembcorp's nominated delivery partner, the Darlington-based National Skills Academy for the Process Industries (NSAPI).

Other key partner organisations include the North East Process Industry Cluster (NEPIC) Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) and the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).

Features will include:

- A special six-month "Pre-Apprenticeship Programme" for 100 people not in related employment, education and training, giving them the general engineering skills that will enable them to carry on into the new apprenticeship programme or compete with other school leavers for apprenticeships
- A 3-year rather than conventional 4-year Apprenticeship for 100 young people
- A 3-week practical programme for 100 graduates aimed at giving them greater awareness of the wider opportunities in and requirements of the sector and be able to be more productive at an earlier stage in their employment. This would be followed by 20 six-week work placements for selected learners.

George Ritchie, Senior Vice President for HR within Sembcorp Utilities UK and the architect of the successful bid, said: "This is a radical new departure from the way apprenticeships and graduate training programmes have been designed and delivered in the past.

"It is the first time we have really been given the freedom to design our own apprentice and graduate training and development programme. That means we can shape something specifically meeting our own needs and those of our supply chain partners as we face the challenges of the coming decades."

"Also, by giving those not currently in employment, education or training the basic skills they lack we are significantly enhancing their chances of getting meaningful employment in the future, possibly even via one of our apprenticeships."

Philip Jones, Chief Executive Officer of NSAPI said: “We are delighted to have been chosen as the supplier of choice by such an elite group of employers. We intend to run a scheme which will meet the 21st Century requirement of manufacturers producing a stream of highly trained and competent people and helping to get hundreds of young people into work.”

Business Secretary Vince Cable said: “Sembcorp’s commitment to creating 200 apprenticeship places through its new development programme is a welcome boost for young people and businesses in the Tees Valley.

“Quality apprenticeships are proven ways of gaining new qualifications while opening the doors to enviable, well-paid careers. They offer business benefits too, including skilled workers and increased competitiveness.

“This is why Government has committed record investment into apprenticeships and introduced programmes like the Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot to help create the right conditions for growth.”

Dr Stan Higgins, NEPIC Chief Executive Officer, said: “There has been a real effort by the partner organisations to develop this project. The innovative ideas within it, helping NEETS get into the workforce and reducing the overall time taken to complete a technical apprenticeship, could revolutionise engineering and scientific apprenticeships in the future.

He added: “All sectors requiring engineers and scientists need to make ideas such as this work if we are to tackle the skills shortages already upon us in some disciplines. Sembcorp and George Ritchie should be commended for stepping up to the plate and leading this project on behalf of the process sector.”

Ian Swales, MP for Redcar, said: “I look forward to seeing this contract get up and running. There has been a lot of hard work from the team at Sembcorp, led by George Ritchie, to get to this point and it is an exciting project.”

“Apprenticeships are vital for this area, and I am delighted that the Government has backed a further 300 in the Tees Valley for a range of people to access. By up-skilling our workforce, we provide young people with the ability to compete in the workplace and increase the amount of people who want to remain living and working on Teesside.”

Stephen Catchpole, Managing Director of the Local Enterprise Partnership Tees Valley Unlimited said:

“As we look to support the growth and development of Tees Valley based companies it is vital that a skilled workforce is available to deliver competitive products to maintain our proud reputation across the process industry.

“This is a significant step in creating a better future for young people in the area and a stronger Tees Valley economy long term.”

Details of the SSDP and how people can apply for the apprenticeship and graduate opportunities are available on www.ssdpnortheast.co.uk

SSDP will supplement existing four 4-year apprenticeship training programmes supported by firms in the region, including the successful Tees Valley Production Technician (TVPT) apprenticeship created by process industry firms in conjunction with TTE and other training providers ten years ago. TVPT has so far seen more than 150 apprentices land permanent jobs with the main companies.

The programme also builds on the success of another recent project led and managed by Sembcorp and delivered by NSAPI. The Tees Valley Apprenticeship Programme (TVAP) was created by the same partner group after the Corus blast furnace announcement in 2009 and closure announcements by INVISTA, Dow and Croda at Wilton. In three years and using £2 million of public money, it rescued 150 apprentices whose futures had been put at risk by these announcements and eventually created more than 150 other apprenticeship opportunities within companies across Teesside including around 80 in the supply chain, 43 of whom had never taken on an apprentice before..

The process industries include manufacturers in the chemical, petrochemical, energy, renewable energy, pharmaceutical, biofuels and oil and gas sectors. To see a full list of companies in the sector and their importance to the regional and national economy visit the NEPIC website www.nepic.co.uk



George Ritchie, Sembcorp Senior Vice President for HR, left, explains to Vince Cable how the Sembcorp Skills Development Programme will work during a tour of the Sembcorp's Wilton 10 Biomass Power Station. The Minister is flanked by Jane Atkinson, SVP Utilities Operations, Phil Jones, Chief Executive of our delivery partners the National Skills Academy for the Process Industries and Redcar MP Ian Swales.



Graduate chemical engineer Tyrone Churchand George Ritchie share a joke with the Minister.



Vince Cable makes a point on skills and development to the process industry business leaders and organisations behind the SSDP initiative at an event held at the Stores Conference Room.