

RECRUITING NOW: Welding & Engineering Apprentices

The WEC Welding & Engineering Training Academy is currently recruiting for the 2008-2009 program commencing in September.

In 2006, the WEC Group, Junction St, Darwen, found themselves in the situation of being unable to fill skilled positions; not due to a lack of applicants, but a lack of skilled applicants. Hence, the WEC Welding & Engineering Training Academy was formed. Providing individuals in Darwen and the surrounding area with an opportunity to gain welding and fabrication skills, it also produces the calibre of workers WEC are looking for.



Over 20 apprentices have passed through the doors of the Academy in the past two years, with 80% working towards securing skilled positions at the Company. The Academy receives a high number of applications every year for the 10 available places.

The 12 month apprenticeship scheme, which can lead to a 5 year apprenticeship with the Company, trains in-

dividuals between the ages of 16-25. Students spend four days carrying out practical work at the Academy and one day at Training 2000, where they learn the theoretical side of welding and fabrication.

“Our high success rate is down to employing a full-time instructor focused entirely on developing our apprentices,” explains Steve Hartley, Managing Director of WEC Group. “Kris Mercer, our instructor, is dedicated 100% to ensuring our apprentices gain the relevant skills and qualifications during their time in the Academy. Our apprentices have access to the latest state of the art welding equipment to enable them to achieve these skills.”

“My work ethic involves achieving high standards,” explains Kris. “I want my students to have the same high standards and pride in their work which will help them in securing a skilled position in the engineering industry.”



Over the 12 month period, students learn different types of welding, fabrication and sheet metalwork, whilst applying their newfound skills to engineering projects. For example, making simple items like tools and tool boxes, to fabricating bridges, benches and even a suit of armour! On completion of the 1st year, successful students move onto the 2nd year where they work towards a nationally recognised City & Guilds 2800 qualification in Welding & Fabrication.

Current projects include the fabrication of a 10m bridge which is being donated to the Darwen Anglers and also a 6m diameter structural steel garden being donated to Darwen Vale's garden show, where it will surround a peace pole.

Current apprentice Scott Clarke, 18, explains why he thinks the WEC apprenticeship program has such a high success rate; “You get involved in more practical work in the first 12 months of this course than you would do in an apprenticeship at College. As soon as you step through the door you are designing and making tools to use throughout the course.”

The apprenticeship scheme is unique within the region as students also work towards a qualification in Coded Welding; a higher standard of welding than is taught on a day-to-day basis. This qualification enables the holder to find work in high-end industries such as oil rigs or pipelines, which demand the qualification.



Daniel Hutchinson, 22, is looking forward to getting the opportunity to gain further qualifications; “I didn't realise we would get the chance to achieve extra qualifications such as Coded Welding and our Fork Lift Truck license. The apprenticeship has far exceeded my initial expectations.” Both Daniel's and Scott's goal is to have the opportunity to continue on WEC's five year apprenticeship program and they are focused on achieving this goal over the coming weeks.

Not only is the Academy used for training apprentices, it is also used to provide staff development and hosts the Saturday School for Darwen Vale students. Students come along to the Academy to learn about different aspects of engineering and provide input into current projects.

Steve Hartley, Managing Director, is pleased with the success of the program in its first two years, “It's a wonderful experience to see students move into full-time work with WEC and continue their development within the Company.



To celebrate the success of our apprentices, we are introducing an Annual Apprentice of the Year Awards Ceremony which will provide a forum to congratulate those who have successfully completed the course.”

If you are interested in applying, please download an application form from www.wec-group.com or pick up from Reception at Junction St or Spring Vale Rd.

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