

NEW CAREER FOR FORMER CALL CENTRE STAFF



Four former UK call centre workers are engineering an exciting new future for themselves in manufacturing industry following the disappointment of redundancy.

The four have joined Sembcorp UK as process technicians on a two year Adult Apprenticeship programme, funded and organised by the UK Government's new National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).

Steven Wilkes, 30, Stuart Slater, 26, Stacey Ritchie, 22 and Nick Tann, 20, all from Redcar, have swapped headsets for hand tools since leaving the OC5 call centre at Wilton International site last September.

The centre, owned by Sembcorp, was forced to close following a decision by Centrica, its sole client, to transfer the work to its headquarters 200 miles away for business reasons.

Now, after passing a rigorous selection process and completing a four day 'Engineering Experience' workshop to gain an insight into general engineering and process techniques, the four have completed a 16-week intensive training programme with a local training provider TTE Technical Training - a key milestone on the road to becoming full process technicians.

Since February they have been working full time on Sembcorp's utilities assets at Wilton, including two industrial power stations and a water treatment plant, as well as studying towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Process Technology.

Steve said: "At the end of the day, whether you work in a call centre or work in a power station, it's about the same thing – satisfying the customer.

"Our experience demonstrates that Apprenticeships like this are not just for school leavers. The training at TTE was interesting and informative and has already given us each a recognised qualification, a Level 2 Certificate in Process Technology. We're now really enjoying the practical 'hands-on' training we're receiving in the workplace while enhancing our qualifications at the same time."

George Ritchie, Senior Vice President of Sembcorp UK, added: "We're delighted to welcome Stacey, Steven, Nick and Stuart on board. All four have proved that they have skills which can be adapted to a new career, along with the capability to be first class process technicians.

"Apprenticeships provide a win-win situation for employers and individuals. They give employers people with the right skills to improve productivity and take their business forward. They also give individuals the chance to do a real job and earn a wage whilst gaining new vocational skills and a nationally recognised qualification."

Proving that vocational training programmes can make the most of people's transferable skills, as well as helping employers to avoid potential skills gaps, Apprenticeships are no longer just reserved for school and college leavers.

The introduction of Adult Apprenticeships in the UK last year has seen many people over the age of 25 changing direction, taking up new employment opportunities or pursuing higher level careers. Apprenticeships, now available for people of all ages, involve paid employment and practical hands-on training, along with study towards NVQs.

Sembcorp is one of hundreds of North East employers making the Apprenticeship system work for them.

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), launched in April, now funds the Apprenticeship programme.

John Wayman, regional director of NAS, said: "Sembcorp has recognised that to stay at the top of its industry, it must train and develop its employees from the start.

"Apprenticeships provide a structured way of helping employers to recruit and train new employees as well as developing existing members of staff. This in turn leads to a more competent workforce. The good news is that there are hundreds of would-be Apprentices out there who are willing to learn new skills and who are committed to making a positive contribution to local business."

The picture shows (back row left to right) Steven Wilkes, Stacey Ritchie (front row left to right) Stuart Slater and Nick Tann.