INVEST FOR SUCCESS

ISMР SAYS:

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ISMР visited KMF in the UK to see how it has invested in new sheet metal technologies and discuss its focus for the future.

KMF is one of the largest subcontract manufacturers of precision sheet metal components in the UK, with a turnover of more than £35 million.

ISMР spent the day with KMF at its Newcastle-under-Lyme facility to gauge how the company has invested in its people and facilities and discuss its strategic focus for the future.

ISMР visited KMF's new £500,000,000 investment in a new purpose-built manufacturing facility for non-ferrous and stainless steel fabrication.

At its modern engineering and assembly facilities, KMF offers sheet metal fabrication processes such as CNC punching; laser-cutting; welding; powder coating; 5-axis machining; and CNC milling and turning, as well as value-added services such as product design, electromechanical integration and supply chain management. It supplies metal enclosures and components to a broad range of industry sectors including aerospace; medical; food processing; defence; security; energy; and sanitation.

“Continuous improvement of our workforce, systems and processes is a central plank of our business objectives while the training and development of our sheet metal manufacturing employees drive our competitiveness and performance and helps us to achieve prominence above other UK and European providers,” the company told ISMR.

“Investment in the latest sheet metal engineering technology benefits our customers through quality, cost and delivery. It is this investment that has kept KMF at the forefront of UK precision sheet metal manufacturing and processing. We are always investing in new machinery — we have spent over £10 million in the last three years on new machinery.”

KMF also runs an employee Productivity Share Scheme (PSS) every year which saved the company over £500,000 last year. Half the saving goes into the KMF Group and the other half is split between the employees who come up with a cost- or time-saving innovation. The scheme was set up to encourage employees to come up with innovative ideas to improve productivity, such as using scanners to find tools in the factory or painting tooling profiles onto KMF-made tooling cabinets.

With over 225,000 square feet overall of manufacturing space, KMF’s objective is to reach a £50 million Group turnover by 2021 when it celebrates its 50th anniversary (or a minimum turnover of £3 million per month).

“We believe that the new stainless steel (KMF Special Products Ltd.) facility will help us access new markets such as sanitation and food processing equipment and contribute to this increased turnover. We are also increasing our focus on the aerospace market to make the most of this robotic bending cell and two Salvagnini panel bending systems. Around 30 staff and operators are involved in bending operations on the KMF shop floor.

In July 2006, KMF invested in a P4-2516 panel bender from Salvagnini, with zero set-up times, which has provided over 78,000 hours of working time (3250 days) to KMF to date. In April 2017, it also bought a new P4-52516 Salvagnini panel bender (P4L) using 60% less electricity than the P4-2516 based on a single shift operation with a cost of 10p per KW, this equates to a saving of around £8,000 per annum. The new machine also features several upgrades including CLA-BBM auxiliary blade command, MAC 2.0 to calculate suitable metal bending trajectories and a Patented Bending Formula which will automatically adjust a bend to any mechanical or thermal deformation. ISMR watched it in operation on KMF’s shop floor.

The P4-2516 required 600 litres of oil, but the new P4L machines use electronic
Investing in skills

In the last ten years, KMF has supported over 150 young people through apprenticeships in engineering, 14 of whom have progressed to degree-level apprenticeships. In March 2017, KMF also beat off stiff competition from OEMs such as Jaguar Land Rover and BMW to win the Skills Innovation Award at the SENTA Skills Awards for its work with apprentices.

On touring KMF’s facility, iSWM viewed its extensive facilities for apprentices including a dedicated practical area for apprentices to work plus separate facilities for classroom training with teachers and trainers. KMF’s much-loved apprenticeship scheme is self-funded and has been very successful, with former apprentices now taking on highly skilled roles in the manufacturing facility and others taking on senior management roles.

Ensuring that we have a constant flow of skilled people coming through to replace those that are retiring is justification for the time and effort that we put into apprentice training at KMF,” explains iSWM. “However, we do not see this as a cost to the business, but as a genuine investment. We want to focus on getting more girls interested in our apprenticeship programmes as we get quite a few on our work experience programmes.”

KMF’s 2017 Annual Apprentice Awards ceremony also marked a milestone for KMF training, with the presentation of the first-ever Adult Apprenticeship certificates. The adult apprenticeship offers current employees the opportunity to gain qualifications alongside their full-time employment, which not only benefits them in their current role but also helps them to progress within the organisation. KMF Precision Sheet Metal was also one of the winners at the North West regional final of the UK’s National Apprenticeship Awards 2017. It was announced as the 'North West Employer of the Year' at an awards ceremony on 9 October 2017, held at the Titanic Hotel in Liverpool.

West’s Employer of the Year’ at an awards ceremony on 9 October 2017, held at the Titanic Hotel in Liverpool. Now, in their fourth year, are run by the National Apprenticeship Service and recognise excellence in training practices across businesses that have made a significant contribution to their workplaces.

KMF recently invested over £10k into new on-site training facilities and teaching staff at KMF Precision Engineering, recruiting five new machining apprentices. This investment will allow KMF to reap the benefits of apprenticeships across the KMF Group and will help secure the skills needed to meet its growth ambitions.

KMF also organises an annual Young Engineer of the Year competition, which captivates hundreds of local students every year and fires their enthusiasm towards engineering. In 2016, KMF is working with Greenpower Education Trust to use the excitement of motorsport to develop STEM skills in students and encourage them into a career in engineering. The project, which challenges teams of year 10 students to design, build and see an electric kit car, is part of KMF’s annual ‘Young Engineer of the Year’ (YEOTY) competition, which is now in its seventh year. KMF involves other local companies to benefit from the rewards of working closely with schools and allocates each school a sponsor organisation, which offers both financial and resource support.

One of the primary drivers of this campaign is to promote career opportunities for young people. Over the last five years, KMF’s Young Engineer Competition has reached more than 19,000 students, worked with over 55 sponsor organisations and invested over £65,000 in the encouragement of students into STEM subjects.

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