



Marine Engineering

Employer: Berthon

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Keith Longman
Yard Manager, Berthon Boat Company

The Business

Lymington-based Berthon Boat Company has been training apprentices for more than 100 years, during which time it has not only produced generations of skilled marine engineers and electricians, shipwrights, painters and riggers for its own business but also helped to make sure that marine skills are being maintained throughout the industry.

The current cohort of apprentices runs to 22, with eight new starters about to join. Yard manager, Keith Longman regards Apprenticeships as the foundation of the workforce and it is easy to see why once you know that over 50 per cent of the company's project managers are former apprentices. Others have gone on to become team-leaders, department heads and managers at Berthon and in other marine companies.

Keith says, "Our Apprenticeship programme is vital to our plans for making sure we have the right skills in the right place at the right time, with individuals monitored closely as they develop and able to evolve in their favoured discipline, which means that their potential is spotted, harnessed and maximized.

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Constantly striving to improve the apprentice's learning experience and develop new training material covering a wider range of skills, Berthon works closely with its training provider, Paragon Skills, and regards its huge investment in training as money well spent. Higher levels of efficiency ensure a higher gross margin, which allows the company to pay more and attract and retain high calibre candidates. Working with local schools and colleges to raise awareness of the opportunities on offer at Berthon and in the marine industry at large has long been part of Berthon's practice.

Berthon remains at the forefront of maintaining and improving marine skills, providing a rounded and varied learning journey for its apprentices, who all get the opportunity to enjoy new experiences, such as sea trials and transatlantic crossings, and develop their skills and interests to the full.

There are still a few places left for 2010 on the Berthon-led Apprentice Expansion Programme to train young people for the marine industry. Employers that take advantage can claim up to £8000 of government funding for each apprentice in training.

The Apprentices

Twenty-two-year-old James Woolgar has double cause for celebration. Not only has he just completed his Advanced Apprenticeship in marine electrical engineering, he also made the final of the Queen's Silver Medal – a competition run by the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights to find the shipyard apprentice of the year. James won the Derek Kimber Award as one of the two runners-up.

The competition involves the short-listed nominees spending a week on Keilder Water in Northumberland – something James says was a fantastic experience in itself. He says much the same about his Apprenticeship, adding that he'd recommend the training to anyone who enjoys hands on learning.

James' choice of Apprenticeship was made on the strength of his liking for boats and sailing and the fact that the marine specialisation makes good career sense. He says, "To work on boats you need to cover everything involved with working on houses and other buildings, plus everything involved with working on cars. You get a really good grounding."

James now plans to consolidate his experience with a couple more years at Berthon, where he knows the company's commitment to training and development will allow him to keep building on his skills, before taking off to spend a few years travelling and working in the marine industry abroad.