



Luxfer – language training eases the path to integration

In 2002 Luxfer Gas Cylinders purchased a French company and is now operating successfully on a European level. A commitment by UK-based staff to undertake appropriate French language training was one of the key elements in the successful integration.

Established over 100 years ago, Luxfer is the world's leading manufacturer of high-pressure aluminium and composite cylinders for gas containment. With six the globe, Luxfer serves customers in many major markets, including medical, life support, beverage, fire, scuba and speciality gases.

The Group has a manufacturing site in Nottingham, and around four years ago, the company purchased one of its competitors in Gerzat, near Clermont-Ferrand in France. David Sparkes is now European Operations Director, and he explains that initially, the two management teams were kept separate, reporting to one Managing Director. In the summer of 2004, however, the decision was taken to integrate the two groups and form one European management team with responsibility for both sites. The newly formed team consisted of a mixture of English and French-speaking members.

Lack of ability to communicate a frustration

David explains: "In any takeover, there are problems of integration, but here we also had to be aware of the language and cultural complications. Some UK members of the management team were already competent French speakers, but we recognised that we needed to make the commitment to increasing the numbers who could function in French. When we visited our French plant, it was frustrating not being able to communicate directly with colleagues on the shop floor."

As a consequence, David and another fellow director undertook one-to-one training with *The Language Company*, a Nottingham-based provider of language training. In addition, the decision was taken to offer French training to administrative, sales and technical staff: three groups of around eight employees undertook weekly 90-minute sessions with trainers provided by *The Language Company*. Groups were arranged according to existing competence and objectives were set for each.

French colleagues positive about commitment

“The reaction to our undertaking French language training was very positive,” comments David. “Our French colleagues realised that it was an indication of our commitment to making the new organisational structure effective.”

As well as the language training, Luxfer also organised liaison visits between the two sites: groups of around 10 employees would go to see their opposite numbers for a two-day visit. When the first group of French visitors arrived, David gave a welcome speech in French, which was well received. He commented: “The exchange visits have proved very valuable. Relationships have been developed and cemented, and both sites have begun to understand the differing business practices between the UK and France, which has aided our efforts to act as a single European unit.”

Language training an important element

Partly as a result of the training and liaison visits, Luxfer Gas Cylinders is now well on the way to achieving its goal of operating as a single business across Europe. “We have had to work hard on a number of levels to make this happen,” reflects David Sparkes, “but there is no doubt that the training provided by *The Language Company* has been an important element in our success.”

Contacts

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Regional Language Network East Midlands

helps East Midlands companies access more international trade opportunities by breaking down language and cultural barriers. The RLN offers a central point of contact for information and support on international communications, and provides valuable commercial information through events, newsletters and briefings.

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