

## ***“BETTER ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE IN THE WORKPLACE”***

### ***Development report 2001 of UK Pilots & Research for Environmental Practitioner Programme***

The EPAW Environmental Practitioner Programme (EPP) has undergone extensive piloting in various workplaces. People tested the learning materials in small, medium and large enterprises throughout the North West of England, a region economically reliant upon engineering, chemical and the aerospace sector. EU funding over a two-year period allowed extensive pilot work to be done across a range of manufacturing and service organisations.

One pilot was carried out in conjunction with the GMB Union in large organisations. EPAW worked in partnership with Groundwork Trust Blackburn, the GMB Trade Union and Blackburn College of Further & Higher Education.

The EPP was also the subject of an academic research project. Nancy Thompson, one of Epaw directors, gained her Master degree in Environmental Education after two years research (Nottingham Trent University 1998 - 2000). She used the development process and trials of the Environmental Practitioner Programme as her action research to discover 'What educational processes enable employees to contribute to improved environmental and sustainable development practices in the workplace?'

#### ***Aims***

The aims of the various pilot projects and research were to:

- ✓ Evaluate the contributions employees made to improved environmental practices
- ✓ Appraise the on-line learning materials
- ✓ Test out competence based activities for appropriateness
- ✓ Discover obstacles to delivery

#### ***The Pilots***

**Pilot 1.** Funded through the EU Adapt mechanism 30 participants from 15 small to medium sized (SMEs) companies across Lancashire in the NW of England took part over a twelve month period.

**Pilot 2.** Funded through EU Objective 2, a further 15 participants from 8 SMEs in Bury, Lancashire used the EPP to improve work practices.

**Pilot 3.** GMB Trade Union pilot, with trade union representatives from large organisations. The GMB provided a “test-bed” in order for seven further SMEs in the Wirral to further evaluate the materials. The pilot was conducted in the NW with the assistance of the Regional GMB HSE & Education Officer, Ann Maclachlan. She found four volunteers in St Helens, from Owen Cornings and Pilkingtons who were willing to give their time and energy for the pilot. The EP Programme has since been officially adopted by the GMB nationally.

**Research.** Participants were interviewed, observed & their work and contributions evaluated against set criteria and current business practices.

### **Structure of the pilots**

Management representatives within the participants' companies agreed to the work-based pilots. Two or three hours per week was negotiated with managers and supervisors for designated time at work to carry out the programme. These were flexible to fit in with the normal, and sometimes shifting, patterns of the workplace. Access to a computer was assured for each participant for a minimum of three hours per week for a nine-month period.

Having identified direct and indirect effects of their work and completed an environmental risk assessment of a chosen activity, recommendations for improvement were presented.

In order to add a dimension that reflected sustainable development the criteria for the participants' improvement plan included *environmental, social, technical* and *economical* aspects.

All participants presented a detailed cost effective and timetabled plan that would reduce at least one environmental impact of their organisation. These ranged from simple to complex measures and reflected the participants' roles and responsibilities within their organisation. The measures proposed were all feasible, economically viable, and represented a genuine improvement on current practices.

### **Better Environmental Practices**

Participants proposed real projects to carry out at work to demonstrate they were competent in environmental practice. Participants made proposals to implement "Environmental Practices" based on environmental principles. These include "Precautionary Principle", "Cleaner Production", 'Waste Minimisation' and "Energy Efficiency" more sustainable principles such as "Social Partnership".

In all the companies examined, the employees contributed numerous ideas or proposals of how to reduce the environmental impacts of the production process. Each participant justified their choice of improvement proposal by explaining the environmental, economic and social benefits at both local and global levels in their plans.

### **Successful recommendations**

The following suggestions were made and implemented during the pilots:

#### **PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE**

- Banned a substance ('trike') to be on the safe side

#### **CLEANER PRODUCTION**

- Enclosed barrel rumbler to prevent excessive noise.
- Protected freshwater by identifying, marking and correct use of all drains.
- Reduced the use of non-renewable resources through in-house treatment and reuse of waste oil.
- Recycled waste vegetable oil as a fuel

#### **ENERGY- EFFICIENCY**

- Planned a product to be produced using less material.

Reduced global warming through improved delivery routes.  
Installed lighting activated by movement in a warehouse

#### **WASTE HIERARCHY**

Recovered raw material waste and arrange for re-cycling of the waste.  
Re-used spilt batch waste produced during glass production  
Reduced raw material usage.  
Recycled glass separators

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**

Presented case at management meetings on legal requirements regarding company move to purpose built premises.  
*\* Three pilot participants found breaches in legislative compliance that were unknown to management*

#### **PARTICIPATION**

Management representative and shopfloor representative worked together to carry out course on environmental practice.

#### **SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP**

Establishing H&S *and Environment* Trade Union Representatives in NW

#### ***Research findings:***

Conclusions of the pilots demonstrated that it is possible to involve people at work from different backgrounds in environmental learning that demonstrates new skills for environmental improvement. Participants, at the level of supervisor, team leader and union representative succeeded in making changes at work. These were not managers with authority for creating changes; participants learnt how to present an improvement plan.

Participants on the various Environmental Practitioner Programme pilot schemes demonstrated real and measurable evidence that they:

- ✓ Had access to and used the given information
- ✓ Gained knowledge about environmental principles and issues
- ✓ Analysed their workplace in relation to the wider environment
- ✓ Made recommendations for changes at work which could reduce the environmental impact and contribute to sustainable development
- ✓ Assisted in the implementation of their recommendations
- ✓ Networked with others both inside and outside the workplace
- ✓ Promoted the concept of sustainable development both within and outside their workplace.

## **Overall Outcomes**

The overall outcomes analysed indicate that the course has merit in improving environmental practices and:

- Compliments companies' strategies for environmental improvement, making environmental management systems more substantial.
- Promotes new skills for environmental practice.
- Demonstrates that working people can take part in environmental initiatives
- Is suitable for people at work with some autonomy but without managerial responsibilities, in vocational terms this is Level 3
- Provides cost effective flexible training directly into workplaces
- Corresponds with government strategy for e-learning.

During final feedback session and through completed questionnaires the following conclusions were agreed with participants on the various pilots:

- They all believed they possessed knowledge and experiences important to establishing greater environmental protection in the workplace
- Some did contribute to their organisation's environmental management system
- They did collect data in different ways to review their organisations' environmental performance and possibilities for improvement
- All but 1 presented their findings to management
- They all proposed initiatives that were cost effective, of social benefit to employees through enhancing work conditions, benefited the community, and reduced their organisations environmental impact. Only two organisations did not act on these recommendations
- Management did acknowledge, in all bar 1 case, the resources and influence that the employees had
- Managers were confident to delegate data collection, knowing it was being done in a controlled and specified way (i.e. to meet course performance criteria)
- Did take messages home, into community and linked issues and impacts to their own lifestyles
- Did feel had new skills - environmental & personal
- Did gain confidence in own knowledge and abilities
- Other environmental changes needed were identified that were not feasible at this point in time

New skill levels of the participants were being recognised at work, these included environmental, personal and IT skills. Two participants had their job roles revised to utilise new skills

Six wished to progress to other qualifications

One participant successfully applied for a more responsible job

## **Comments from external observers**

".....it is the interface between the shop-floor and management where changes to working practices are implemented. This is the area where training and

education of employees is most crucial and yet sadly neglected...(and that)I believe what you have addressed this area and would like to offer your training throughout our programme”

*Peter Mann, Project Manager 'Accelerate for the Car Industry' DTI funded regeneration programme, West Midlands.*

“... the existence of national standards set against a set of guiding principles would focus environmental training against an accepted criteria. At the moment there is much confusion and ad hoc training with no means of assessing the results. This would seem to offer an alternative.”

*Danny Martland, British Aerospace: Health, Safety and Environmental Manager, March 2000*

“ Weekly trips made to the bottle/waste paper banks may be, for most of us, 'our bit for the environment'; the availability of a nationally available qualification which focuses on effective environmental practice in the workplace marks a major step forward in the nature and extent of the contribution individuals can now make to sustainable development.”

*Isobel Sutcliffe, director of NCFE Awarding Body, April 2000*

## **Conclusions**

The Environmental Practitioner Programme is appropriate for larger well-organised workplaces, particularly those with good quality systems working in social partnership

The Environmental Practitioner Programme is not just “training materials” but a whole way of setting out what needs to be done. Many people could use it as an extensive resource, as a tool at their desk.

Employees can make and carry out recommendations for improving environmental practices, reducing impacts, and supporting management in the implementation of environmental changes and systems through the use of the Environmental Practitioner Programme

*Why not start the programme.....[www.epaw.co.uk](http://www.epaw.co.uk)*

*EPAW would like to thank all the organisations mentioned above, assessors, verifiers, participants and others who helped to make these pilots possible.*