

As we move into unchartered waters, we need to retain talent

In this guest column, Richard Smith, engagement director at the not-for-profit organisation TRS, which supports careers in manufacturing, engineering and technology in the UK, explains the origins of the organisation and how it helps to link employers with employees.

Shortly after it was elected in 2010, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government undertook a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). The purpose was not only to update the UK's defence and security policy, but also – unsurprisingly, given the new government's fiscal policy of austerity – to seek areas in which cuts could be made to the defence budget.

The review concluded with a target of closing a £38bn funding gap in the Ministry of Defence, with cost reductions coming from cutting back civilian staff in the MoD by 25,000, and making cuts in the procurement and maintenance of equipment.

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Naturally the implication of these cuts went wider than the MoD, and it was estimated that the number of job losses across the defence industry would be in the region of 60,000.

The Business Secretary at the time, Dr Vince Cable, was rightly concerned about the fall-out. The defence industry is a major contributor to the UK economy and an important employer. The potential loss not only of jobs, but crucially of skills within the sector was worrying.

At that time, a programme known as TRS (Talent Retention Solution) was working well across several Regional Development Agencies (East and West Midlands, South East

and Southwest), with the aim of supporting the attraction, development and, most particularly, the retention of talent, primarily across engineering, science and manufacturing. TRS was not a recruitment agency; rather it provided employers and employees with a platform to balance the supply and demand of talent within a sector, especially when large-scale redundancies were taking place.

As businesses were shedding jobs, TRS provided a platform where affected people could register, be seen, and be taken on by other employers, thus retaining a national pool of industry skills to meet the needs of UK plc.

TRS was identified as a possible way of mitigating the fall-out from the SDSR and similar hardships to industry inflicted by austerity-led policies or the slow recovery of the UK economy. In the spring of 2011, the green light was given to scale TRS up to a national model, which Ministers launched in early July 2011. There was some initial Government funding for the launch, but since

early 2012 the whole programme has been funded and led by industry.

Having to make redundancies – or, even worse, being made redundant – isn't something that we really want to think about. Fortunately, we don't make large-scale redundancies every day, but we live in uncertain times and they do happen. Most recently, JLR announced that it would be cutting 4,500 jobs, most of them from its UK workforce. This is on top of 1,500 job cuts it made in 2018.

It is best to be prepared for such eventualities, for the sake of our workforce but also for the sake of our industries, where

retention of skills and talent is critical. This is why major companies such as Airbus, Rolls-Royce – itself in the process of cutting 4,600 jobs in the UK – BAE Systems, EDF Energy, Boeing and Leonardo, continue to re-invest in the programme for the “greater good” of the industry, to support companies and people alike in difficult times.

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A not-for-profit programme, TRS also enjoys the support of trade associations such as Gambica, professional bodies such as the IET, IMechE, the Royal Aeronautical Society, and trades unions such as Unite and Prospect, who help us to engage with their membership to spread the word and help raise awareness of our work.

We first came across Gambica a few years ago and are delighted with the ongoing support and renewed enthusiasm for our work. With the recent appointment of Terry Scuoler, formerly CEO of the EEF as the new chairman of TRS, we are keen to support industry going forward whatever 2019 and beyond may bring. ■

For further information on TRS and how it works, please visit <http://talentretention.co.uk/> or contact Richard Smith directly at richard.smith@wincon.co.uk (tel: 07791 722242).

