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Welder training – challenges and solutions to meet the demands of the diving industry

TAKING THE PLUNGE

THE diving industry is unique in how it operates with its employees. Unlike an engineering employer, who takes on apprentices, obtains Government funding for day release or full/part-time education and the apprentice is rewarded with a National Qualification. The diving industry mainly operates through sub-contract or self-employed routes so the 'standard' route to education and qualification is not available (unless already qualified). This places the emphasis for any qualifications firmly with the individual diver, not the employer. Welding is an important skill for the diving industry and such recognition and availability is essential.

Qualifications

In welding, the term 'qualification' has a specific meaning, which is simply understood as a 'coding'. i.e. a practical weld test in which the welder demonstrates his physical skills and abilities. Of course, this element of the welder's ability is essential as welding is a craft-skill and physical ability is a large part of the job. But remember, for the engineering industries, this physical skill is supplemented with a number of years at college; i.e. ONC/HNC/HND, etc and most importantly, a management structure exists where foreman, senior engineers, supervisors and inspectors are employed by the company; and responsibility for welding, does not lay with the welder. This structure does not generally exist for the inshore and offshore diving industry, where the hands-on expertise can be limited. A diver-welder may well find himself the only competent welding person on site, thus has to have greater expertise in welding than simply being able to deposit weld metal. Another diving industry problem is people are attracted from all sorts of backgrounds, with engineering being a minority. Thus, the physical skill factor, although crucially important, is not in itself sufficient to provide the

industry with the next generation of competent, skilled welder-divers, divers with a minimum standard of competency in welding; which needs to include; safety, techniques, materials, weldability, electrodes, terminology, plant/equipment, weld defects, standards, etc. There is more to welding than just burning rods.

Because most divers are self-employed and responsible for their own training/qualifications, unless they put themselves through college, there is limited opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet future industry demands or even progress and extend their knowledge base.

What next?

As we know, once you are in the workplace, it is sometimes becomes difficult to attend college. One course of action is through Speciality Welds, who have developed an 80-hour welding training programme, called The WeldCraft-Pro. This course follows the International Institute of Welding (IIW) and European Welding Federation (EWF) guidelines for fillet welding and the qualification is issued by EAL (EMTA Awards), the UK's largest engineering and marine training authority, issuing over 80% of all the UK's engineering qualifications.

The programme is recognised by IMarEST and is the only competency assessed underwater welding course that meets all of industries current demands. Training is provided through approved diver training schools, allowing training to take place for new recruits immediately after diver training. For existing divers, the training is as compact as possible, usually taking no more than 10.5 days.

It is crucial that the industry attracts the right calibre of individual, but equally important, industry needs to ensure training exists to the right standard providing all the skills necessary to keep Britain competitive and leading the field. ■

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