

Discussion Issue 1: Manufacturing in the South East is very advanced and high value, but given the decrease in employment in the sector, how can SEEDA help dispel the misconception that manufacturing is a dying industry?

Positive PR in all media would help enormously. Focus on the success stories rather than the popular bandwagon failures and employment decreases. One of our members for example is 140 years old, showing good profitable growth year on year, an expanding dedicated workforce and good systems. Help us communicate such success to a larger audience.

The death of manufacturing is not a misconception. Survival for manufacturing needs support from government in reduced regulation on product and employer law. Sterling is too strong when compared with the US Dollar. Transport costs are too high, support for fuel costs would be welcome.

Discussion Issue 2: How can SEEDA help to ensure that there is productivity improvement in manufacturing for the sector to compete successfully in global markets?

Financial support and practical assistance in the implementation of LEAN would help.

Small improvements in productivity are always achievable but the bigger challenge is Far East labour costs and the de-regulated native of Asia manufacturing.

Discussion Issue 3: How can the skills needs to keep the manufacturing sector highly productive and competitive be met before the competitive advantage to the region is lost?

Increased emphasis at schools and colleges to consider manufacturing as a career. Several of our members have conducted school parties including teachers through their factories this year and all have commented that a video explaining a modern factory activity and use of technology would dispel the myth of manufacturing being a dirty backward thinking environment. The video could be used with GCSE; teaching the focus and aspects in that manufacturing curriculum.

Discussion Issue 4: In view of the fact that Lean Manufacturing is hard to sustain, requires time and uses resources that companies do not have when they are in the process of cutting costs, how can Lean be sold to companies as a means to encourage process and product innovation and, in turn, raise productivity?

Good case studies that are relevant to the sector in which the manufacturer operates. Well trained, hands- on consultants who will involve and assist in the process of change rather than merely explaining the theory.

Fully funded support by Government to change the processes that manufacturers employ.

Discussion Issue 5: To what extent should MAS concentrate on providing high quality support at the expense of penetrating the SME market in view of the limited resources it has?

The target should be to encourage specific companies that are receptive and able to implement change rather than quantity based. The latter will spread resources too thinly and will have a discouraging effect to most companies.