

**‘The Star’ Industrial Survey contribution from the Master Cutler, James Newman  
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I WAS never a boy scout. I enjoyed sport but campfires, knots and bob-a-job were not for me. But those who were involved in such activities would have had the scouting movement’s motto ingrained into their young minds – Be Prepared – as important now as it has ever been.

In the past 12 months manufacturing capacity has been reduced and staff laid off – not just in South Yorkshire but across the country. It is impossible to say where we are in this recessionary cycle. An upturn could be many months away but when it comes, as it inevitably will, we need to be ready. That readiness means not only having access to finance but also to the best equipment and skilled personnel, sometimes known as ‘Advanced Manufacturing’.

‘Advanced Manufacturing’ is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century buzz-phrase which has yet to be clearly defined. Is it manufacturing dealing with hi-tech materials in hi-tech industries such as nuclear and aerospace, in which case it encompasses a few, or is it manufacturing using hi-tech equipment and processes, in which case everyone should have the ambition to be included.

There is no doubt that most manufacturers, however low down the supply chain, would benefit from hi-tech production. Even a widget can be made using advanced techniques and materials but there seems to be a fault-line developing between what the Government calls ‘Advanced Manufacturing’ and what the average regional manufacturer perceives as their place in the technology league tables.

The aerospace and nuclear industries route will lead to innovation and the creation of new industries and standards in the region. The important role business leaders, the Universities, the financial aid system and others can play is to encourage the rest of the supply chain to improve their manufacturing techniques through the use of advanced manufacturing technologies. It is only through the promotion of this latter route that the whole region will stay ahead of the rest of the manufacturing world.

The University of Sheffield’s Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre does this for Rolls-Royce and Boeing, amongst others – improving the methodology for more efficient manufacture. There is no reason why others cannot utilise the benefits of this high level work but they need ambition, encouragement and, in many cases, the finance to do so.

If we do not take this wider course, we could be in danger of confining the benefits of advanced manufacture solely to the hi-tech, high profile projects that carry with them instant publicity – supersonic flights and rockets to the moon – when really we should be using it to improve the supply chain from the smallest link upwards. Only by doing this can we maintain our ‘best of’ badge that ‘Made in Sheffield’ means to the world.