

## CASE STUDY

# The future's clear for automotive glazing apprentices

In one of the most fast paced sectors of British industry, worth an estimated £5billion annually, the automotive glazing market is responsible for keeping vehicles moving, safely and conveniently. Despite the advances in technology, historically the industry as a whole has lacked specific national qualifications and a recognised career structure, including Apprenticeships. Thanks to a number of new initiatives and partnerships, that's changing.

## Behind the glass

A windscreen is more than just a piece of toughened glass. It's a technology all of its own. 'Smart glass' windscreens now incorporate solar and hydrophobic coatings, rain, light and heat sensors, radio and GPS antennae and even Head-Up Display.

Not only that, the windscreen constitutes some 30% of the structural integrity of a modern car. The use of glass in vehicle construction has increased significantly and panoramic windscreens and sophisticated roof lights are in vogue with car designers.

All this demands a complex set of skills when it comes to repairing and replacing automotive glass. With the windscreen now integrated into a number of vehicle systems, those at the sharp end need to be highly competent technicians, not simply fitters.

## Skills shortfall

The independent automotive glazing sector is a fragmented market with an estimated 700 firms operating in the UK, many of which have just one employee. Of that number, there are approximately 50 businesses in the Essex region. Competition is fierce and highly territorial.

Although the product itself has developed massively, the sector itself has been found wanting in terms of succession planning and promoting itself to new recruits, largely due to the historic absence of industry-specific vocational qualifications, as well as a recognised programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). This has resulted in significant skills gaps and shortages within the workforce.

In addition, the sector has not devoted time or resources in engaging the attention of young people as an industry offering positive career prospects. According to the Office for National Statistics, youth unemployment rose to a record level of 965,000 (20.5%) in 2010. With one in five young people currently out of work, this is exacerbating an already acute problem of skills shortages for businesses involved in the manufacturing and process sector, such as automotive glazing.

## **A new vision**

First established in 2008 and officially launched in 2009, the Independent Windscreen Academy (IWA) has developed as a beacon for careers, skills development and professional accreditation within the automotive glazing industry.

In a bid to recruit high calibre trainees into the sector, IWA introduced a brand new national Apprenticeship in Automotive Glazing into the market, in partnership with Proskills, the Sector Skills Council for the Process and Manufacturing Sectors.

Thanks to a joint initiative with Essex County Council's learning consortium, Essex Apprentices, the apprentice's wages are majority funded in the first year, to encourage employers to invest in trainees.

### **Maria Charlton, Director, IWA:**

"In less than two years, IWA has developed a significant presence within the automotive glazing sector as the organisation that can help businesses and their technicians benefit from national qualifications and industry-accredited training. Our proposition allows even the smallest automotive glass replacement operation to increase its scope by investing in professional development and Apprenticeships.

We were delighted to receive the support of Essex County Council in helping create opportunities for young people as part of its wage subsidy programme. This has helped enormously in starting to improve perceptions of work based learning and the value of qualifications within the sector."



### **Jim Wilkinson, Skills Manager, Essex County Council:**

"Essex County Council identified a number of specific industry sectors that were key to economic growth in the county, and through the overall pledge to support over 1000 new apprenticeships in Essex, looked to address those with help in employing young people. Thanks to the work of a number of local training providers, including IWA, we have been able to support 130 new apprenticeships. The scheme has proved a real success."

## A foot on the ladder

Seventeen year old Bradley Rosewell from South Woodham Ferrers walked into Essex Glass and Windscreens with his CV and asked if there were any vacancies. He was taken on by the firm as one of the first recruits onto the 12-month Apprenticeship and is also keen to pursue a Business and Administration qualification.



### **Bradley Rosewell, Apprentice:**

"I'm really enjoying the experience so far. I'd looked at other skilled trades but they weren't for me. Automotive glazing is so important in modern cars that I wanted to learn more about it, so it's an exciting challenge. I enjoy dealing with the company's customers and working with the bookings system, which is all part of the job."

Having left school at 16, Aydan Barry from Benfleet, was interested in a career in the automotive sector and was introduced to IWA through Connexions. The Academy found Aydan an Apprenticeship with Windscreen Services, based in Canvey Island.

### **Aydan Barry, Apprentice:**

"I've always wanted to have a career that involved working on cars and I found out about automotive glazing through Connexions when I left school. Being able to fit a windscreen on my own has been one of my best ever achievements and I hope to be out working in my own van in a couple of years."



## Making a difference to employers

Apprenticeships in the independent automotive glazing market are already helping businesses by offering a proven way of harnessing fresh talent. On the job learning ensures apprentices learn the skills that work best for the business, resulting in increased productivity and loyalty.

Research has shown that companies investing in training are 2.5 times less likely to fail during a recession. In a nation-wide poll carried out by Populus, the overwhelming majority of employers (92%) felt that apprentices made a valuable contribution to the business within six months of them completing their apprenticeship or earlier. The survey also found that businesses believed that investing in apprenticeships made them more competitive (80%), provided higher overall productivity (76%) and contributed to lower staff turnover (80%).

**Martin Gadd, Managing Director, Windscreen Services:**

“Initially I was reluctant to get involved in Apprenticeships as I’d been let down by previous employees but when I interviewed Aydan on the recommendation of IWA, it was clear that he wanted to work and make a genuine contribution to my business. There’s no question that the automotive glazing sector needs to move forward and become more regulated and Apprenticeships will play a role in the sector’s future. For a small business like mine, the wage subsidy support provided by Essex County Council has been really welcome.”

**Leon Charlton, Director, Essex Glass and Windscreens:**

“There’s a real need for new blood in our industry and we were keen to recruit Bradley as he demonstrated potential by approaching us in person for a job. He’s fitted in well with the team at Essex Glass and Windscreens and understands the importance of customer service and ensuring the accuracy of information, which is critical in vehicle glass replacement. He’s become a real asset to the business in a relatively short timescale.”

## **A global showcase**

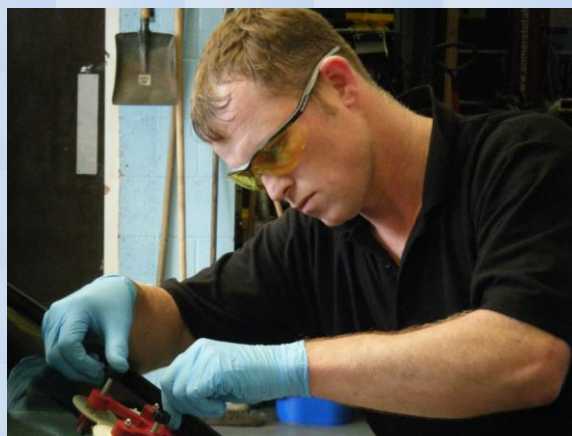
As part of an industry-wide campaign to showcase the skills needed in automotive glazing, IWA teamed up with Proskills in the launch and organisation of UK Master Fitter 2010, the first national skills competition across the whole of the automotive glazing sector with the objective of finding the best automotive glass technician in the UK.





In only its first year, UK Master Fitter has been included in the automotive disciplines of the global Worldskills event. Commented Maria Charlton, Director, IWA, which is providing administrative, technical and training assistance:

“It’s fantastic to see automotive glazing recognised within Worldskills and this will help us take UK Master Fitter to new heights. We hope that businesses will get behind our campaign for skills recognition, as we’ve got some very talented people in our industry. It’s a great chance to see them compete internationally as we saw with Matt Cassells, the 2010 Master Fitter champion who came fourth in Germany, a brilliant achievement at his first attempt.”



## Representing the sector

**Terry Watts, CEO, Proskills:**

“We are working hard to promote the opportunities available in the manufacturing and process industries and together with organisations such as IWA, we can make real progress.

There is a continuing need in our industries for investment in training to help companies and individuals grow through up-skilling. We need employers to recognise the vast opportunities and benefits that work based training schemes such as Apprenticeships can offer. A skilled workforce has an impact right across the industry, from increased profit margins to international competitiveness.



Apprenticeships are critical in ensuring that vital skills are not lost from industry within the next 10 years and as university fees rise and increased competition hampers opportunities for young people, they are crucial to affording a career path for the next generation.”

**To find out more about IWA, call FREE on 0800 1699773 or visit [iwa.gb.com](http://iwa.gb.com)**