

## It's crystal clear – training works

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It was crystal clear to Saint Gobain Quartz that a highly skilled and motivated workforce was vital in the drive to stay ahead in a competitive, hi-tech environment.

So the Wallsend based manufacturer of fused quartz and silica products set about developing a plant wide training programme that would ensure everyone in the team could operate to full potential and make the maximum contribution.

Through the jointly funded Learning and Skills Council (LSC) North East and One NorthEast 'Train to Gain' service, the company signed up to various workforce development programmes. The most recent programme saw Access Training engaged to deliver team leadership NVQ level 2 training for 17 members of Saint-Gobain Quartz staff and TDR Training delivering NVQ Level 2 – Performing Manufacturing Operations to 33 shop floor workers.

This commitment helped the company to secure the Access Training Employer of the Year title. Fusion Team Leader Steve Searle, 49 and from Wallsend was also named Employee of the Year for his commitment to training despite ill health which kept him away from work for long periods.

Saint-Gobain Quartz Human Resources Coordinator Paula Lawson said: "Steve has been a real inspiration to us all. He's shown great courage and determination

and we were delighted when he won the award which is thoroughly deserved. Picking up the company award was nice too.

“Since re-organisation five or six years ago we’ve made a huge commitment to training. Many employees have been on at least one course and there is no doubt business performance has improved across the board as a result.

“We supply to over fifty different industries worldwide, including semi-conductor, fibre optic, optical, infrared, automotive, aerospace, foundry and chemical applications and it is a very competitive market. We have to perform consistently well to remain a leader in the industry and training is one of the main reasons we do so.”

The Train to Gain service, aims to help organisations get the training they need to stay ahead in a competitive environment by improving the skills of the workforce. Developed as part of a wider effort by the Regional Skills Partnership in the North East to increase the productivity and further regenerate the region, Train to Gain ensures that skills brokerage is available to employers in the North East.

The service offers impartial advice and matches training needs to local learning providers, to ensure that flexible, responsive training programmes are delivered to meet employers’ needs. A core element of Train to Gain is the access to appropriate funding from Skills for Life to higher education Management and Leadership learning opportunities.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: “Saint Gobain’s success in a competitive market is not down to chance. It’s because the company has made a commitment to training in order to help its people develop and fulfil their true

potential. Well done to them all, particularly Steve who has refused to let illness stand in his way.”

## **ENDS**

### **Editor's Note:**

Picture caption: Some of the Saint Gobain Quartz staff who have undergone training, pictured (back row, left to right) John Burns, Davy Dodds, Neil Johnson and Stan Taylor. (Front row, left to right) Steve Searle, Alan Browell.

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world-class standards. Our vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

In the North East, the LSC and One NorthEast are working closely with other agencies to ensure that the design and delivery of Train to Gain is fully integrated with other types of support on offer to business. This includes ensuring the skills brokerage services is integrated with the Business link branded support service and that support available is fully aligned with the support to employers from other agencies in the region, such as Jobcentre Plus – which can assist with recruitment of staff.

Train to Gain service provides:

- A comprehensive analysis of an organisation's training needs, which also identifies the elements that may be applicable for funding, as well as those for which the employer must pay.
- Easy access to relevant, flexible, high quality training, delivered mostly in the workplace using an “assess-train-assess” model, which takes the employee's prior learning and experience into account.
- Information and support to access a wide range of training packages including higher level qualifications (including Level 3) and training which may not lead to a qualification.
- Information and advice to employees on qualifications and training, eligibility for LSC funded learning opportunities, financial support, skills shortages and priorities.
- Support to develop strategies to address future training needs, which are aligned to wider business objectives.
- A contribution to wage costs to help employers when staff are absent from work due to training (available only to companies with under 50 employees).

Further information about Train to Gain can be found at: [www.traintogain.org.uk](http://www.traintogain.org.uk) or by calling 0800 015 55 45.

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