

NORTH WEST MOTORSPORTS APPRENTICES SKILL UP TO MAINTAIN UK'S POLE POSITION

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Learners from Blackpool and The Fylde College have been given the chance to really hone their skills at an expert motorsports skills class. The session, organised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Summit Preparation and Blackpool and The Fylde College, was held at Donnington Park Race Track just days ahead of the Spanish Grand Prix.

The UK's £5 billion motorsport industry employs 40,000 people and boasts most of the world's top racing teams. Moreover, it remains at the cutting edge of high performance engineering. However, nearly half (45%) of businesses in the sector say difficulty finding skilled staff at technician and engineering level is seriously threatening competitiveness as nearly a fifth of companies (19%) believe engineering's negative image is failing to attract talented young people. A further 46% say existing staff lack the skills they need to do their jobs¹. To tackle these issues, the expert class at Donnington Park focused on helping learners move their own skills up a gear and underline the world class skills they will need in tomorrow's workplace. Learners formed pit teams and were exposed to the level of skills excellence required for preparing race cars and doing all the pit stop maintenance necessary to keep them in the race.

Gary Jackson, 22, a Light Vehicle apprentice at Polar Ford in Bradford and at Blackpool and The Fylde College, says: "The Apprenticeship I'm doing involves lots of hands on experience, which means I've learnt a lot quicker than if I'd been doing solely course-based work. Also, as the course is backed by a main dealer, I get to keep up to date with all the latest engine management equipment and training". Gary, who says he hasn't looked back since enrolling on the Ford Apprenticeship after leaving school, continues: "As careers go, this is a really exciting one. I hope to one day go on to a senior management role in motor engineering. I'm absolutely delighted to have been picked for the expert class at Donnington Park."

The class is part of the LSC's From Competence to Excellence programme, which runs throughout England between now and the end of June 2008. Five thousand young people

¹ Motorsport 100, Motorsport Development UK, Jan 2008

across the country and 1,000 tutors will participate in courses ranging from learning how to apply lime mortars, plasters and renders to historic buildings, catering and hairdressing to dry stone walling and groundsmanship. The classes will generate and accumulate training material for future use and many of the tutors involved will develop themselves to become skills super coaches – helping to extend the concept of excellence throughout their region.

The classes aim to inspire those taking part by demonstrating the quality of skills needed at a world class level, and injecting real excitement and dynamism into learning. With so many tutors involved, the expert classes will also share best practice across the country and contribute to a lasting skills legacy.

John Korzeniewski, Regional Director for the LSC in the North West, said: “The UK has long maintained pole position on the world’s Formula 1 stage and a skilled workforce is the key to ensuring it stays that way. The issue of declining skills is not however limited to the engineering industry, and across the series of workshops taking place in the North West, apprentices working within a wide-range of vocational areas will receive tuition and inspiration to help take their skills to world class level... demonstrating the real value of an Apprenticeship.”

Paul Higham, Race Team Manager at Blackpool and The Fylde College, says: “Engineering is often viewed negatively by young people as a career option. We wanted to challenge this perception by designing a class at Donnington Park that would excite learners and introduce them to the fantastic motorsports careers they could go on to have.”

Last year over 110,000 apprentices achieved their Apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are increasingly being used as a pathway to university, often part time and with financial support from their employer whilst they continue to work.

The From Competence to Excellence programme is a stepping stone for participants, helping them move their skills levels from good to great. With the UK WorldSkills event on the horizon, some of them may even become future entrants to the UK WorldSkills Event in London in October 2011.

Ends

Learning and Skills Council:

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality 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 young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

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