

Skills the secret to Aquafab's success

A Northamptonshire-based company that specialises in supplying components for the maritime industry is weathering the current economic storm thanks to a revolutionary training programme developed by The National Skills Academy for Manufacturing (The Skills Academy) and delivered by Northampton College.

Operating from an industrial unit in the village of Old, near Northampton, Aquafabs Limited may be a long way from the sea but this has not prevented it becoming a leading supplier to some of the country's best-known luxury yacht makers.

In its first four years the company has seen its turnover rise to around £500,000 thanks to a commitment to providing a quality, bespoke service and to ongoing training for its eight-strong workforce.

Explained the firm's managing director, David Steele: "You wouldn't naturally associate landlocked Northamptonshire with boat building but it has proved an ideal place to set up a business thanks to the high levels of manufacturing skills in the area.

"This skills base is due to the excellent courses offered by Northampton College and when I set up my own business it was the first place I turned to when it came to developing my own skills and those of my employees.

"I had also heard of The Skills Academy through their association with world class manufacturers such as Rolls-Royce and Toyota and when the college said it was working with the organisation I was keen to get involved."

Last year David and his team all undertook a NVQ Level 2 qualification in Business Improvement Techniques (B-IT) that was developed by The Skills Academy utilising its own 'Learning Engine' approach that ensures benefits from training meet clear business objectives.

Delivered by the college, which had to meet high strict criteria to become an approved provider, the Skills Academy's B-IT is also unique in that it ensures that skills learnt are put into practice in the workplace.

After embarking on the training, which was partially funded under the LSC Train to Gain scheme, David has seen his turnover double and over the past few months the company has maintained an even keel, despite the global recession.

Continued David: "The luxury end of the boat building industry has been particularly badly hit but because of the systems we have introduced as part of the B-IT process we have managed to survive and are now planning to expand into new, larger premises.

"The training has enabled employees to make suggestions on how to improve our production process to make it more efficient as well as systems to cut down on lead times.

"In addition to making the business more profitable, working smarter has also helped to boost morale and everyone is pulling in the same direction as part of a team," he added.

Paul Taylor, The Skills Academy's Regional Manager for the East Midlands, said: "Aquafabs is a relatively young, small company but it provides an excellent example of how a bespoke training programme can have a profound impact on the success of a business.

"Now David and several key members of his team are planning to progress to Level 3 of the B-IT NVQ and I am sure this will provide a further boost to the business, as will the move to new premises later this year."
