

Passing on the skill

David Thornton, Chair at The Window Company (Contracts) asks why craftsmen aren't being used to train apprentices by passing on their skills



Recently, I joined the RFIT Forum to give my thoughts on the issues which matter most to installation companies, in the hope that as many as possible of these can be covered at the conference running alongside next year's show.

Unsurprisingly, the skills shortage was high on everyone's list, and particularly the urgent need to attract the next generation of fitters into fenestration.

It struck me that the industry has already taken lots of positive, proactive steps to address this – from Building Our Skills to GGF apprenticeships. Many are having a degree of success, but we are still in a situation where we are losing skills as more fitters are leaving the industry than are joining it. So, what else can we do about it?

The biggest challenge remains. How do we persuade youngsters – and their parents and educators – that fenestration is a credible trade which offers the same kinds of opportunities and financial rewards as becoming a plumber, mechanic or electrician?

From an installation company perspective, I think the group we probably need to mobilise are the skilled fitters themselves. We need to encourage them to spread the word



David Thornton

about the opportunities and rewards available and give them more platforms to be able to do that – before they retire.

It might be controversial, but I think we should also be making it possible for them to take on the bulk of the training as well. Classroom training and paper qualifications are immensely valuable, and our fitting teams all have ongoing training programmes in place and hold or are studying nationally recognised NVQs. But, they are no substitute for the kind of on-the-job-training you only get if you work alongside someone who has spent decades perfecting their craft.

Whenever we have incentivised one of our older fitters to take a trainee under their wing, we have invariably ended up with a highly motivated young employee who has stayed with us long term and gone on to achieve NVQs. They have learned from the experts the art of installing a whole houseful of windows in a single day and at the same time seen close hand the degree of care and customer respect that is essential in the commercial sector. Crucially, they have also seen just what it takes to earn the best rates and realised that you don't become a top earning fitter overnight.

Interestingly, the benefits have not all been one way either. As well as being rewarded for their efforts, our experienced fitters have taken immense pride in their mentees' progress and reported improved job satisfaction from having their skills recognised and valued. That increasingly looks like a win-win to me. □

www.thewinco.co.uk

Talking to the future

The skills gap won't be solved overnight, but by taking a more targeted, Generation Z-focused approach, we can start building the foundations for a stronger, more sustainable future for our industry, writes Sam Nuckey, managing director of Window Ware

The skills gap in the glazing industry is a persistent challenge and has been for many years, and despite numerous initiatives and discussions, we are still struggling to attract new talent into the sector. I think it's time we took a different approach to the issue.

At the recent Glazing Summit, we heard insights from Mark Handley of Building Our Skills and Mark Capper of Mencap about various initiatives designed to attract new entrants to our industry.

These programmes are excellent and vital for our sector's future, but I believe we need to dig deeper and look at how we can make our industry more appealing to the next generation.

Fantastic opportunities

The fenestration industry offers fantastic career opportunities across multiple disciplines, from fabrication and installation to sales and marketing. However, we need to ensure these roles evolve to meet the expectations and aspirations of Gen Z-ers.

With new government initiatives focused on improving UK housing stock and evolving legislation and regulations, we need fresh talent with the right skills to meet these changing market demands. But rather than simply trying to fit new recruits into traditional roles, we should be asking: "What do young people want from a career in fenestration?"

Proactive approach

At Window Ware, we have taken a proactive approach by engaging with our Gen Z employees to understand what they want from their job roles and careers. This generation has different priorities and expectations from previous ones, and we need to adapt accordingly.

As an industry, I feel we must engage with our younger employees and take notice of their insights and use the feedback to help implement meaningful changes. For example, what career progression paths do they want, are they looking for flexible working arrangements, what opportunities are they looking for to work with new technology and sustainability initiatives?

We need to evolve how we present ourselves to young people. By shaping roles around their aspirations and expectations, we can create an environment that appeals to this demographic and naturally attracts and retains the



next generation of talent while maintaining the high standards and expertise that have always been our hallmark.

The time to act

“What career progression paths does GEN-Z want?”

But we have to act now. This is not just about filling current vacancies – it is about futureproofing the fenestration industry and ensuring we have the skills and expertise needed to meet tomorrow's challenges.

The fenestration sector has always been innovative in terms of products and technology, now we need to apply that same innovative thinking to our approach to recruitment and career development.

The question isn't whether we should change, but how quickly we can adapt to meet the needs and expectations of tomorrow's workforce. Otherwise, we risk losing immense knowledge and capabilities within our industry if we don't act quickly to share and transfer them to the next generation. □

www.windowware.co.uk