



North East Yorkshire & Humber Case Studies

Existing Members of SummitSkills Regional Implementation Groups include

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ConstructionSkills
Desco Design and Consultancy Limited
Dunnill Mechanical Engineering Services
Gateshead College
Gordon Heating and Plumbing
Haden Young Ltd
Hartlepool College Of Further Education
HVCA
Inviron
Job Centre Plus (North East)
JTL (North East)
Len Craggs Electrical & Plumbing Contractors
Lorne Stewart NE
LSC (North East)
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Northumberland College
ONE North East
Palmer & Weir Ltd
Redcar And Cleveland College
Stella Maintenance Technologies Limited
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Training makes good business sense. If your staff don't have the right skills for the job, you're not only unprepared for today's projects, but also vulnerable to future risk as the marketplace becomes more technical and competitive.

As the Sector Skills Council for building services engineering, SummitSkills works across the sector to encourage employers of all sizes and types to invest in training. It's not just about craft skills; at every level of your business – craft, technical, managers, supervisors and directors – it is vital to have staff who are qualified and competent.

But don't just take our word for it – this booklet showcases employers from all walks of the building services engineering sector and also gives a great example of how other related industries use our skills, qualifications and training programmes.

They describe the ways that training really does pay and, for them, how staff development is not just an optional extra, but an essential investment for a sustainable business.

Andy Haith 4
Haith's Heating

Brian Falcus 7
Inviron

Dave Horkan 8
Hevertch

Julie Rose 11
Fenhams

Malcom Bell 12
Stella Maintenance Technologies

Alison Ashworth 15
NG Bailey

Since **Haith's Heating** was established in 2000, staff turnover has been negligible. Owner **Andy Haith** believes this is a reflection of the environment he provides for his workforce and the positive way they are treated. For him, recruiting apprentices means he benefits from home-grown skills carefully honed to his exacting standards.

We're committed to an apprenticeship ethos and I currently employ five apprentices; they're key to the development of our business. At present we operate a rolling training programme, so our business evolves every other year and our team builds in capacity as the apprentices graduate into fully qualified operatives.

In the early days when the business was first growing we became exceptionally busy and I recruited qualified fitters to help us in the short term. Because they had been in the industry for a long time they had their own ways of working, not how I wanted it to be done, and it was hard for them to adapt. As soon as we were able, we took the step to recruit apprentices and bring our training in-house to ensure consistency of skills and approach.

By working in this way we can train new employees to our company's high standards and mould them into our way of working. Overall we find this approach more efficient and cost-effective; ultimately we can promote our business as one that uses its own, fully skilled, competent operatives.

Our training extends to our clients as well as our staff. Grimsby Institute is not only our training provider but also a client of ours. We've been able to support them by taking their maintenance staff out to work on some of our projects, to help them develop and provide experience in different disciplines. This works well for both organisations and strengthens our relationship with an important client. Our partnership with Grimsby Institute works well and we benefit from regular reviews and a clear structure for apprenticeship development. Using the support of an external provider means you always have a clear process to work through if there are any issues to address.

In this business you have to care: I care that customers are happy, I care about getting repeat business and I care about my team. The company view that we hold at the top filters down to the whole workforce, who in turn take pride in their work.

"If you train your own staff, you'll achieve a higher quality of work, which leads to a greater trust from clients and customers."

Client perception of your company also improves. I like to think they look favourably upon us because of the training we provide. Within the company we see it as payback to the industry. We were all young once and everyone needs a chance. If we can provide that opportunity we will; if no companies train then eventually there will be a void of operatives which is not a situation this industry wants to be in.

Some of our competitors hire and fire on monthly basis depending on their workload, but that doesn't breed loyalty. If your staff are not loyal, standards will slip. I've been called to jobs serviced by companies that use agency staff and witnessed the poor quality of workmanship left behind by these people.

If you train your own staff, you'll achieve a higher quality of work, which leads to a greater trust from clients and customers. We base our business around the best service, which means standards have got to be high - and you can only do that through developing your own people.





A 100% commitment to staff development is helping **Inviron** to achieve its aim of becoming the most respected building services provider in the UK. For **Brian Falcus**, arming staff with the tools and competences they need to excel is the most effective route to business success.

To achieve our objective of becoming the best in our field, we need to ensure we develop staff across the whole spectrum of skills – apprenticeship, craft, supervisory, engineering and project management, as well as the essential health, safety & environmental skills. Each level links directly to others, so we believe you must train at all levels for the business benefits to be sustainable.

Having the right people to lead and develop the business is important to us. We undertook an extensive review and talent-spotting exercise at mid-management level to identify future leaders and nurture them with support and training. We've put upwards of 60 people through this process so far in a combination of both practical in-house development right up to MBA level, which has been hugely beneficial to us.

“So far our customer feedback shows our training efforts have not gone unnoticed; they recognise and appreciate that our staff are fully skilled.”

As a result of training, we have excellent staff retention levels and a motivated, engaged workforce who recognise our commitment to them. This mutual support manifests itself in strong, collaborative interaction across all our teams, closer working relationships, more attention to detail and, ultimately, increased profitability.

Through our award-winning customer care programme, Inviron DNA, we give clients, who have undertaken the programme, the opportunity to score us on a monthly basis, against a set of key drivers. This provides us with robust data on the areas where we are excelling and opportunities for improvement. So far our customer feedback shows our training efforts have not gone unnoticed; they recognise and appreciate that our staff are fully skilled and the amount of repeat orders we receive demonstrates that fact.

The support of training providers is crucial to help us in our quest. On a local level we use JTL and BEST for our apprentice training, and Newcastle College, Gateshead College and New College Durham for some of the higher level training. External provision teamed with our own in-house training means we benefit from the best of both worlds.

Outside the business, I've become an industry ambassador through SummitSkills to promote the sector and its potential career opportunities to students and teachers. There's often a huge misperception of building services engineering among young people, but most of the ones I've met are very receptive so I believe showcasing the sector in this way is just what the industry needs to ensure its future.

Our training has also gained external recognition. We were very proud last year when one of our team won a national apprentice award and we were equally delighted when Inviron was named the 2009 Best Apprentice Employer of the Year by JTL. Also last year, our managing director was named one of Ernst and Young's Regional Entrepreneurs of the Year 2009, which underlines our commitment to excellence at all levels.

Some employers are still resistant to the idea of training but I would strongly advise that they make it a priority because we know for a fact that it pays. Training remains central to Inviron's ongoing success; it's one of the most important factors in our very strong business performance to date. To have such a high level of competence in your team, supported by a structured training programme, is truly rewarding. It gives us the ability, and the confidence, to stay ahead of our competition. This is more relevant in today's market and economic climate than it ever has been.

Over the years **Heverttech** has learned that all training is beneficial and ultimately adds efficiency to projects. **Dave Horkan** believes that through the company's training programmes they can be confident they have a highly skilled team on every job.

We believe in putting back what we take out. We have around 45 employees at Heverttech and it's not just apprenticeship training we take part in. Across the company we have members of staff undertaking accountancy and communication courses, senior management involved in business development training and a number of technicians undertaking their Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Building Services with Leeds College of Building.

Health and safety training is fundamental to our business as part of a continual process, to ensure all staff are up to date with safe working practices and reducing the risk of injuries when on-site. We have an ongoing health and safety training matrix that is regularly monitored and each member of staff completes all the relevant training they need to perform their job properly.

We are now designing and selling environmentally-friendly solutions to our clients, which means our technicians have to be fully up to speed. In particular, we ensure they have appropriate knowledge and skills on sustainability issues, energy saving techniques, lighting efficiency and the most appropriate use of gasses. In addition to their external training, we carry out in-house mentoring for our HNC students to ensure they excel in this area.

By formally qualifying our technicians, we have staff that are fully competent in M&E design. This allows us to return project tenders more competitively than previously and ultimately helps us to secure future work. Clients can tell in the quality of work produced for them whether a company trains or not. When they see we have a competent team and a sound training ethos across the whole company, they realise the added value that sets us apart from our competitors. We've already had positive feedback from clients which reinforces our efforts and proves it's worthwhile.

Our commitment to training has also bred loyalty from our employees and we're pleased to say our apprentices do not leave us. One joined the company from school and progressed upwards through electrician, approved electrician, technician and is now a project manager. He would not have achieved this without his own dedication, teamed with our training and investment. Apprentices and operatives are the flagship of your company on the ground and client perception of them is very important, which is why it's crucial to ensure their training is of the highest quality.

“The companies who invest in staff development and are loyal to training are miles apart from those who don't.”

In the future we'll continue as we do now and ensure we're always fully skilled in all areas of the industry. We know that our processes and practices work; they satisfy our internal needs and those of our clients. Overall, training for us has led to stronger relationships, both amongst our team and also with the people we work with.

Clients are now demanding a professional and competent service and legislation is changing week-by-week. The companies who invest in staff development and are loyal to training are miles apart from those who don't. It's the proactive companies who will win the business as the market becomes more competitive. The ones who choose to ignore training will fall by the wayside.





Fenham

A long established family business

Heating and electrical engineers **Fenhams** know that a skilled workforce isn't just about complying with legislation. According to **Julie Rose**, training has put them in a stronger position for tender opportunities and has ultimately generated growth and increased profit.

Clients want staff development to be part of your business practices. When we bid for work, a key part of the assessment process involves questions about training; how much training we carry out, the types of training we conduct and the last time we undertook training. We have a proactive approach to skills so can provide comprehensive details on past and future training and our successes to date.

In the past 12 months we've invested over £85,000 in training across the business, including apprenticeships in technical disciplines as well as core health and safety skills. Our staff have also undertaken training in business administration, customer services, and supervisory and management training with the Institute of Leadership & Management.

“Increased knowledge leads to qualified and competent people, which in turn boosts morale and provides structured career paths.”

The target for us over the next year is for all our staff, including senior managers, to undertake equality and diversity training with North East Equality. We're striving for the Equality Standard that is currently in development and we're keen to be one of the first employers to achieve that accolade.

Forming strong relationships with external partners has helped us to get the most from our training programmes. Trade Training Associates supports us with most of our training which means we don't have the sole responsibility of coordinating staff development, and ultimately leaves us more time to run the business.

Business Link has helped us to source funding and training. We've benefited from Train to Gain funding via both Business Link and through our other training providers. It's not just for technical training, but also for areas such as marketing and business development. Our partners have the experience of how to access funding, so we benefit from their knowledge and gain the financial reward without having to deal with the administrative side.

In addition to the advantages we get at the tender process, overall we've found many benefits of training and up-skilling our staff. Increased knowledge leads to qualified and competent people, which in turn boosts morale and provides structured career paths. With better confidence, they become more efficient in their work. We have noted improved productivity and performance, heightened awareness in relation to legislation, better environmental awareness and significant waste reduction as a result of our staff development.

Outside of the company, this year we were delighted to win the medium employer category of the CoLaS (Celebration of Learning and Skills) awards and the large employer category of the Grant Aided Heating Installers Network awards. Both prizes were for our commitment to training and development and it proves that you can be recognised as an employer of excellence if you have the right ethos.

We're also training for tomorrow as well as today. There are a lot of oil-based and LPG projects that we're tendering for at the moment, so we're already training people in anticipation of this work. By doing this we can demonstrate to clients we're preparing ourselves and will have a team primed and ready to go when needed. We see this as part of being a proactive business that takes positive action to support its clients.

Stella Maintenance Technologies made a decision eight years ago to develop its workforce through recruitment and in-house training. It's paying dividends so far, says managing director **Malcolm Bell**. From top to bottom he has a workforce that operates efficiently and in a way that represents his company in a professional manner to clients.

Our electrical apprentices have been trained through JTL, Newcastle College and Gateshead College and we are currently looking at courses at both colleges for further education at HNC, HND and Foundation degree level. Skills in leadership, management and client care are delivered in-house and cascaded from supervisors down to their own teams.

There are definite benefits of having apprentices on our projects rather than externally recruited operatives. They see exactly how we perform and how we conduct ourselves, and in time they become ambassadors for the company. From an early stage apprentices get taught that our work is about a connection between two people, a mutual and professional respect to allow business relationships to prosper. If that chemistry isn't there, the business fails to exist. By training apprentices with those values, they represent us on-site in the best way possible.

Apprentices also represent a cost benefit to the company. There are times when we can safely put a first or second year apprentice onto a job to allow one of the project's three or four fully-trained operatives to work elsewhere. However, I've always believed this is a secondary rather than a planned benefit. The popular practice with some companies is to put as many apprentices onto a project as possible, to keep costs down and maximise profit. Sometimes this isn't right as the quality and safety of a job can be put at risk if the ratio of skilled personnel to apprentices is out of balance. If the project can sustain apprentices, then it's good for them and us, but not for the sake of cutting corners.

Training has also helped us to develop major differentiating factors that make us stand out among our competitors. We're fully accredited in ISO quality management systems and are one of only two companies in a large geographical area that has this advantage in our field of service provision. My staff have been inducted into these quality systems and clients do not get the same level of service anywhere else. Our client feedback has shown that this approach has paid off, as we often hear that no other company on the tender list provided as comprehensive information as we did.

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On a wider skills level, I sit on SummitSkills' Sector Skills Implementation group. It allows me to come together with like-minded bodies such as the Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus, colleges, universities and other employers to prioritise what skills issues we should be addressing as a sector and how to implement those plans. It's important to me to look at how we can contribute to the sector's skills strategy.

The future for us holds more of the same. We will continue to train at all levels, but this will be underpinned by us having the right volume of work to allow that to happen. It's completely understandable that employers consider the financial side of training, but through careful planning you can ensure you develop the skills for your business to succeed.





NG Bailey has been training in-house since 1969 and has developed enviable facilities for apprenticeship, technical, graduate and management and leadership training. **Alison Ashworth-Brown** believes that the flexibility and control the company has over its internal development provides employees with tailor-made skills that perfectly meet business needs.

We're a people business. We don't manufacture products, we solely rely on the knowledge and skills of our workforce, so it's really important that we train and develop staff or we'd find it impossible to function.

It's true that training requires investment; a lot of people see it as a cost to the bottom line. We believe that employers should take a strategic, long term view, even though it may be difficult to justify in the current economic climate. The UK demographic is changing and it's clear that we have to train existing workers as well as young people if our businesses are to continue operating efficiently. Employers need to take the view that it's not just a cost; it's how much it will cost their business if their employees don't have the right skills to do their jobs.

“There's undoubtedly more pressure from clients to have appropriately skilled people to deliver their projects, so in this respect we can stay one step ahead.”

Running an in-house training facility means we can adapt quickly when we need to, rather than working to an external schedule. For instance, in the past we've added an unvented hot water element to our mechanical apprenticeship to respond to a particular business need. The same applies to our management training; we develop courses to suit our own requirements.

In-house training is also advantageous when clients ask about our people's skills. We can both demonstrate our quality and also specifically describe how we conduct training to rapidly respond to new skills needs. There's undoubtedly more pressure from clients to have appropriately skilled people to deliver their projects, so in this respect we can stay one step ahead.

We know our internal training strengths, but we're equally aware of where others have better expertise. That's why we work in partnership with external providers such as Leeds College of Building and other management schools to deliver certain courses. Institutes such as Northumbria University and Loughborough University also validate our higher level qualifications, in conjunction with professional bodies. Our partners have their own specialist areas that we draw upon in order for us to get the best of both external and internal training.

In the Yorkshire and Humber region we contribute to SummitSkills' Sector Skills Agreement Implementation Group and I also sit on SummitSkills' management committee and two of its interest groups. It's important that we take part because employers should feedback to SummitSkills about their needs in order for the right strategies to be developed. We contribute to ensure our needs are considered as part of the skills planning process. We see it very much as a two-way street.

We are always reviewing and developing our training. We can't afford to be complacent, even though our current structure is strong. For the future we're looking at new programmes, improving our apprenticeship and graduate programmes and rolling out activity to the rest of our business. It's a constant process we go through to stay on top.

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