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Research Centre Calls for Funding Clarity to Help Fill UK Automotive Industry Skills Gap

The success of the UK automotive industry is creating increased demand for new skills. However, uncertainty over access to funding could jeopardise government targets of delivering 3 million new apprentice starts over the next 4 years, according to Thatcham Research.

According to a recent report by the Automotive Council skills shortages in the industry could see up to 5000 jobs left vacant. Whilst a separate report from Engineering UK concluded that the UK does not have the current capacity or the required rate of growth to meet the forecast demand for skilled engineers and technicians by 2022.

“Apprentice graduates form the backbone of the UK automotive industry and, more specifically, the crash repair sector,” says Thatcham Research head of operations, Dean Lander. “It’s imperative that training providers like ourselves are given the financial flexibility to support this automotive success story.”

As an automotive academy backed by a fully operational vehicle research centre Thatcham are better positioned than most to understand the challenges brought about by new technology. The Academy has adopted a flexible apprenticeship model that can react to industry trends and technological advancement to produce a graduate that understands the latest technologies, materials and repair techniques.

“We’ve worked hard to ensure our apprentice programmes continue to deliver highly relevant learning. We know that the skills and new talent are certainly out there and we know that advances in technology will continue to generate inspirational opportunities in the industry. What’s more of a concern is that delays on funding decisions could be stifling potential growth.”

Under the new funding framework provided by the SFA (Skills Funding Agency) many training providers are having to decide on whether to take on additional new apprentice starts with no guarantee that additional funding will be forthcoming further down the line.

“Overall, the government’s plans aimed at increasing participation in apprenticeships and making them more relevant to employers should be applauded.”

Thatcham Research are preparing to work closely with a consortium of crash repairers, insurers and industry specialists in creating the new standards which will be even more closely linked to the ever changing demands of the industry as part of the Trailblazers initiative.

“Giving those involved in the industry the opportunity to structure the learning framework makes fundamental sense. However, all the good intentions could count for little if cash flow and funding concerns prevents training providers and employers from taking on the required number of new learners,” added Lander.

As the automotive landscape moves ever closer to fully connected and highly automated driving, the need for a new generation of technicians who understand current issues such as those around safety sensor calibration, working with hybrid and electric powertrains and the repair challenges posed by lightweight composite construction materials are ever more apparent.

“National Apprenticeship Week is focused on helping apprentices ‘Rise To The Top’ – we are aiming to ensure the foundations are strong enough to help keep them there,” concluded Lander.

ENDS

Editors’ notes:

Additional assets can be found here <http://news.thatcham.org/> and include

- A case study of an apprentice making her way in the world of automotive repair is available
- Photographs of crash repair apprentices in action at the Thatcham Research Academy

About Thatcham Research

The Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre, or 'Thatcham Research' as it is widely known, was formed in 1969 by British insurers. The centre is the independent voice of automotive safety & repair, advising motorists, insurers and vehicle manufacturers to help reduce accident frequency, severity and costs.

As well as its world leading crash and track research, Thatcham tests and accredits crash repair parts, vehicle repair technicians, and a number of other products and services within the collision repair industry for insurers, motor manufacturers, equipment manufacturers and suppliers.

A founder member of the international Research Council for Automobile Repairs (RCAR), Thatcham has also been a member of the European New Car Assessment Programme (Euro NCAP) since 2004.

Apprentice Week

National Apprenticeship Week is coordinated by the National Apprenticeship Service, with the aim of celebrating the positive impact of apprenticeships on individuals, businesses and the economy, increasing awareness and take-up of advanced learning opportunities. The aim of the UK government is to encourage 3m new apprentices by 2020, and apprentice participation is currently at a record level: 871,800 funded places in 2014/15.

Over 1300 graduates have completed the Thatcham Automotive Academy Apprenticeship Programme since 2004, with a further 40 celebrating their graduation this June.

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