



# APPRENTICESHOP

**S**ister company to the operator of Manchester College within LTE Group is apprentice provider Total People, which has offered HGV and PSV technician apprenticeships for years. They were previously located in a busy workshop shared with a light vehicle course as well as other engineering and manufacturing courses at its Openshaw (Manchester) campus.

But last year, it repurposed a building at its Wythenshawe training site, 10 miles to the south, where it also hosts construction skills apprenticeships, opening a four-bay workshop for vehicle apprentices.

"The reason for the move was to develop a bespoke, dedicated site. In order to grow that provision, it needed to be fit for purpose, and used just for that," says Paul Rogers, Total People product director. "The site gives us extra space which is really a shell for development. We can bring in expertise and work with employers about the latest developments and bring those vehicles in."

Now, the facility hosts 260 apprentices in groups of 32, who spend a week there eight times a year, supervised by two on-site tutors.

**Next month begins the three-year course of the latest cohort of apprentices for Total People's Wythenshawe (Manchester) campus. But the training provider, which launched a new dedicated facility last year, hopes to continue to increase the numbers through its doors, particularly of HGV apprentices, reports Will Dalrymple**

Total People offers the Level 3 bus and coach engineering technician apprenticeship (in mechelec and electrical, although most are the former), as well as the Level 3 HGV service and maintenance technician apprenticeship (mechelec only). Almost all - 85% - of the students are from bus and coach, although both groups study together during the first year. And they all stay with Total People throughout both 36-month courses, plus another three months dedicated to preparing for an end point assessment (EPA) from IMI.

That first year of the course also emphasises time in the workshop, doing hands-on work, health and safety and housekeeping, although all year groups get both theoretical and practical education. "Usually we'll have 16 in the classroom and 16 downstairs and then we'll swap, depending on where they are in the course," states Candice Davies, operations director.

The workshop holds two HGV tractors and two Euro V buses loaned from FirstBus, as well as a Somers vehicle lift. In addition, there are six engines set up on rigs, and six work benches for working on practical skills, such as using hand tools.

## **BENCHMARK**

Also important in the workshop are the ranks of benches set up, where apprentices witness practical demonstrations, leave to try out tasks, and then return to document their experiences in their online portfolio, observes Davies.

She adds: "We don't like to have them in the classroom for too long. Learners that want to come into this trade are used to doing, and being in a workshop, not sitting and listening in a classroom. That's why we have benches and stools in the workshops. They do a bit, and then take it back with them. When we teach in the

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For extra tool time, Total People offers apprentices revision weeks and access after lessons, Davies states. “The good thing about having whole blocks of weeks rather than days with learners is that they can stay behind and work on stuff after the classroom work finishes, and staff will stay and support them.” While in Manchester for the week, apprentices stay at a local hotel.

Online-based training adds a third leg to the provision, adds Rogers. “We try to design blended programmes with online content where it’s relevant, alongside practical experience in the workshop and classroom for theory.”

After apprentices return to their home workshop, Total People follows up on their workplace learning. Explains Davies: “When they’ve completed their week’s training, they go back to the workplace. And we tell the employers what they’ve learned in college and how to embed those skills into working life in those premises.” In addition, three learning coaches keep an eye on apprentices in the work environment to make sure that they are on track, and are being supported by a mentor and supervisor from the employer.

**CLOSE RELATIONSHIP**

“As a training provider, we only have them 20% of the time. When they are in the workplace, that’s where they get meaningful learning, because 80% of the time is with the employer. What’s key for us is a good relationship with the employer to understand what skills they need to embed with their work,” states the operations director. To that end, part of her role is liaison with the site’s two big customers, First Bus and Metroline.

These relationships extend beyond progress reviews. “Larger employers have training managers that support



apprentices. They say, ‘we want to develop this part or this part’. Every year we have a curriculum evaluation, and see how well it helps with EPA results,” she adds. In exchange, the operators will offer tutors places on CPD events from OEMs bookable with a new vehicle purchase.

The provider-employer relationship is closer than it used to be, thanks to the apprenticeship levy, according to Paul Rogers. “It’s shifted quite significantly from working with lots of SMEs to some larger employers, whereby the employers were probably more hands-off previously. Now, with the levy, larger employers are keen to spend, and are much more keen to be involved. Rather than just giving us learners that we train, this is a much closer relationship.”

That includes operating a satellite training workshop in London, with a single trainer and 76 apprentices for Metroline (see [www.is.gd/mapuha](http://www.is.gd/mapuha)).

While First Bus and Metroline might send 60-100 apprentices per year, at the other end of the scale are much smaller learner volumes from operators including Olympia Travel UK, Go Northwest, Selwyns Travel, Abellio,

Reading Buses, Avonline Transport, Vision Buses, Falcon Coaches, HG Richmond and Biffa Liverpool.

The company’s vision is to continue to expand the operation, doubling past intakes to 120 apprentices per year (half each in Easter and September). Beyond that, it is looking at other apprenticeships in related trades, including a levy-funded driver training programme for Metroline.

It also hopes that a revision of the apprenticeship standards currently with the trailblazer groups will provide training guidance on electric vehicles that is currently lacking, Davies says.

Melanie Nicholson, MD of Total People, says: “Our vision is to use our technical and apprenticeship expertise to become the primary provider of bus, coach and HGV engineering apprenticeships both across the North West and nationally. By focusing on emerging technology, such as hybrid vehicles and green technology, as well as the engineering fundamentals, we will work with operators to produce the next generation of fully-rounded, highly-skilled bus, coach and HGV engineers.” 