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# Powered access apprenticeships - Back to the future

The first IPAF approved aerial lift technician apprenticeship courses are now well underway in the UK which are, in many ways, similar to the traditional mechanic type apprenticeships from the 1950s that were formalised by an act of parliament in 1964.

Since the advent of the 'modern apprenticeship' and the structured frameworks in the mid-1990s, which were updated in 2009, the system seemed to lose its way. More and more school leavers were steered towards university based non-technical forms of education. In spite of the fact that apprentices earn a salary while gaining a qualification, as well as avoiding the burden of student debt. A resulting skill shortage has also meant that many of those that followed the apprenticeship route of higher education are earning more than the average university graduate! Fortunately, there appears to be a shift back towards apprenticeships - although this is yet to show up in the numbers.

Within the aerial lift or telehandler industry, the closest apprenticeship courses available for aspiring mechanics/service engineers was in 'Plant Maintenance', which focused on construction equipment in general, largely excavators and other earthmoving equipment. While they included a good grounding in engines, hydraulics and basic electrics - all of which are present in aerial work platforms and telehandlers - they fail to cover specific aerial lift related training, such as safety inspections critical for working at height equipment or platform operation. At the same time, they also included many

aspects that are of little use for those working with aerial lifts. IPAF has been working on changing this for some time, however it was not until the latest changes to the UK apprenticeship schemes, and the various support available, that it became possible. A good deal of committee work and investigation also led the federation to discover that the forklift industry faced similar issues. The FLTA, BITA and IPAF therefore got together and, finding that their requirements were exceptionally similar, began to jointly develop the Level 3 Lift Truck and Powered Access Engineering Technician apprenticeship.

The apprenticeship will not only give students from both fields specific education on both types of equipment, but also take apprentices a step further towards gaining IPAF Competent Assessed Person (CAP) status. The fact that an increasing number of forklift rental companies are now also running aerial work platforms is also proving an additional attraction, along with benefits for the trainees.

The first eight apprentices to set out on the three-year programme started their block release college training in late April at the North Warwickshire & South Leicestershire College. Spread over 10 weeks of college training each year, the modules include

the service, repair and maintenance of forklifts and powered access equipment, as well as the inspection and maintenance of vehicles and equipment, diagnosing and repairing faults.

The course costs £14,000, but if you are in the UK and pay the Apprenticeship Levy it is usually covered by a grant from the government,

or rather than the Levy you pay! If you do not pay the Levy, you are still only required to cover five percent of the cost - so in this case £700 per student for the three-year course. Interest in the course and the apprenticeship programme is such that the college has already extended it to include an additional cohort in September - which is already fully subscribed - and two further intakes in October to meet demand. F-TEC in Swindon also operates a rolling intake and at the same time a number of other colleges are considering adding the course to their syllabus.

IPAF's UK & Ireland general manager Richard Whiting, who played a leading role in the development of the 'IPAF Roadmap', said: "It is very

positive that this newly developed pathway to certification is already proving very popular, and that both existing employees in the powered access workforce and new recruits to our industry are set to benefit as part of this first tranche of inductees. We are also pleased to welcome North Warwickshire & South Leicestershire College as an associate member, the second wave of inductions will occur in September. Wider interest is such that the college has already extended its next intake."

"Instructors at the college are all experienced engineers and lift truck instructors and they will be upskilling and increasing their knowledge of powered access by completing their IPAF operator

training and MEWPs for Managers course. IPAF is also providing the college with Andy Access safety posters, technical guidance documents and other relevant materials, while member companies such as CTE, GT Access, Power Towers, Nationwide Platforms, Skyjack, Versalift, Spanset and Niftylift have all provided equipment for apprentices to train on."



The first Powered Access Engineering Technician apprentices arrive at college



One of the workshop training areas



The Construction Centre at N. Warwickshire & S. Leicestershire College



Students are taught on aerial lifts and fork trucks