

## **Building Tomorrow's Workforce**

*Alex Goodfellow, CEO at Donaldson Offsite, explains how Donaldson Timber Systems is using targeted training to address the skills crisis.*

It's well documented that the construction industry is facing an unprecedented challenge when it comes to skills. With experienced tradespeople retiring faster than they can be replaced and school leavers drawn to careers elsewhere, the skills and labour gap is widening at an alarming rate.

But this crisis isn't just about filling positions – it's about ensuring the next generation understands the evolving demands of modern construction, particularly as we transition toward more sustainable building methods and increasing use of offsite timber frame and Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

The scale of the challenge requires solutions that go beyond traditional recruitment. It demands partnerships between industry and education; programmes that inspire young people, and initiatives that attract talent from other sectors to create the diverse, multi-skilled workforce the industry desperately needs.

### **A blueprint for success**

Donaldson Timber Systems has experienced how strategic educational partnerships can deliver exceptional results. Since 2018, the team has collaborated with West Herts College, supporting the Level 2 Site Carpentry & MMC apprenticeship course, creating a bespoke programme specifically designed for timber frame construction.

The partnership extends far beyond theoretical learning. Donaldson Timber Systems provides hands-on workshops and has constructed a timber frame demonstration unit at the college, allowing students to see, touch, and interact with the materials and techniques they'll use in their careers. This multi-sensory approach – combining audible, vocational, kinetic, and visual teaching methods – maximises engagement and retention.

The results speak for themselves: a 100% success rate with all apprentices completing the course and securing employment. The 2.5-year programme combines four days of on-site work experience with one day of college-based learning, including specialised MMC modules covering construction technology, health and safety, and timber frame build systems.

In 2022, Donaldson Timber Systems took this commitment further by placing and sponsoring a college apprentice with one of our subcontractors, providing real-world experience while supporting both the student and our supply chain partners.

### **Expanding the talent pool**

While this college partnership is proving successful, we know the industry can't rely solely on school leavers. With this in mind, they have also developed programmes targeting career changers.

In 2022, they developed a training initiative for contracts supervisors and managers, specifically targeting colleagues who are new to the industry – either just starting in their careers, or joining us from other sectors. The programme takes them through a series of experiences to understand timber frame manufacturing, particularly the site management side of the business.

Six individuals have been through this programme, bringing diverse perspectives and transferable skills from their previous careers.

These initiatives represent more than just training programmes – they're investments in the industry's future. The ability to enhance learners' understanding of timber frame and MMC creates a win-win situation for all stakeholders.

### **Building a culture of growth**

Supporting skills development is crucial to the ongoing evolution of the construction industry and is something we're committed to. We're proud to have a culture that has no limits on personal development and encourage all our colleagues to continually develop and grow.

Ultimately, the future of timber frame construction – and the wider housing sector – depends on the skills, confidence, and commitment of the people who deliver it. By creating partnerships that combine practical experience with academic learning, and by continuously seeking out and nurturing new talent, the industry can build the workforce it needs to meet the challenges of tomorrow.