



Feeding the growth of LTA

THE Landbased Technicians Accreditation (LTA) scheme was launched in December 2007 to be a readily identifiable benchmark for recognising the skill levels and competence of service technicians across the industry.

But after almost five-years, LTA has been described as the 'industry's best kept secret', elitist and the preserve of two or three major manufacturers.

DAVID KIRSCHNER, who is acting as a consultant to the industry takes us through the current state of play with LTA and looks at the opportunities for growth, much of which will be focussed on bringing independent dealers, those who do not hold one of the major franchises, into the scope of the scheme.



In my experience there are three types of manager in industry; those who are aware of change and proactively plan to adapt the business to meet the changing circumstances, those who are aware of change but too complacent to realise how it will effect them and finally those who have no idea that change has taken place at all until it is too late.

The proactive manager will put aside time to think about the business, the influence that change has on business performance and the actions required to keep the business competitive and on track.

Let me stimulate thought on some of the changes influencing industry remembering that change is not restricted to just one sector of our industry.

What follows is by no means a definitive list, but look what the country is facing. Double dip recession, capped municipal budgets, high fuel prices, areas of the country are facing drought conditions, whilst others flood.

Meanwhile, precision farming has arrived, super dealerships are being formed,

the technology employed within our products is at an all time high and the skill set required by our industry technicians is more diverse than ever.

We face a daunting challenge of recruiting engineering technicians of the right calibre (as do all engineering sectors), the number of apprentices being employed is steadily declining, the industry's workforce needs up-skilling and plans to cover succession especially in the educational sector are required.

It is clear that there will be increased demand from all engineering sectors for highly skilled technicians. This means that our sector has to get better at recruiting, retention and development of our staff.

Government funding used to educate our apprentices and full time students has been savagely cut and yet the rewritten National Occupational Standards place greater demands on the colleges to deliver at a higher level.

These issues are facing the industry as a whole and by industry I mean the many and diverse sectors that land-based engineering

encompasses, the collective body of independent businesses and trade associations, the manufacturers, the dealerships, customers, educational establishments and training providers. It is not possible to influence all challenges we can only adapt to some of them; however others can only be addressed by 'industry' as a whole. (That's you by the way.)

So what has all this to do with LTA and how can it help? Firstly I have no doubt that if asked to write everything you know about LTA many would struggle to fill the back of a fag packet let alone a postage stamp.

It is unfortunate that LTA which has the potential to address so many of the issues facing industry is viewed as being such a well kept secret. Since 2009 did you know that 215,000, yes 215,000, LTA leaflets have been distributed through Ag and Turf publications, handed out at shows or mailed out by manufacturers? To say nothing of the presentations made to dealer groups and other industry meetings.

It's abundantly clear that industry as a

whole must endorse the initiative and spread the positive benefits that are there to be gained. LTA is a legacy that will assist this fantastic unique industry in meeting its customer's needs. For those of you well versed in Customer Care it will be apparent that all parties referred too in this article are indeed customers of each other.

The LTA scheme explained

LTA is the acronym for the Landbased Technician Accreditation scheme which provides a career pathway for technicians and after market managers within our industry.

The need for such a scheme was recognised by industry representative members of the Careers Project formed to address the challenges facing the land-based engineering industry regarding the recruitment, retention and development of high calibre staff within our industry. The need for such a scheme was also supported by a survey of dealerships who endorsed that our sector lacked a clear career pathway.

These issues could not be tackled by any one individual, company or organisation and therefore to the credit of industry, commercial interests and competitive elements were put aside to jointly produce a proactive scheme that raised the profile of the industry and provided the opportunity for recognition of an individual's expertise.

How does LTA address the issues?

Recruitment

Colleges, manufacturers and employers who engage with the LTA scheme can clearly demonstrate a career pathway when discussing landbased engineering career opportunities with parents, school leavers, potential apprentices or job applicants. The career pathway leads to professional registration as an Engineering Technician with the Engineering Council through the industry's professional body, IAgRE.

LTA has assisted in dispelling the commonly held perception that our industry employs 'mechanics' working with low level technology having little prospect of progression or any possibility of achieving recognition for their skill and expertise.

Retention

Job satisfaction is a major factor in staff retention as is being recognised and respected for the knowledge and skills possessed. LTA encourages continual professional development and offers the opportunity to gain a professional status at LTA Tiers 3 & 4.

There is nothing more soul destroying than attempting to meet a customer's expectations, often in high pressure situations without the personal skills and underpinning knowledge required to secure the customer's satisfaction. Conversely there is



nothing more satisfying than being able to command personal respect and recognition for your professionalism.

Personal competence brings assertiveness and confidence, better working relationships with customers, less stress and a greater sense of wellbeing. Being part of a company team that invests in its staff training and the provision of service excellence brings with it employment security. It is plainly obvious that technicians with no confidence, faced with poor customer relationships, high stress levels, low self esteem, working for a company with a poor reputation and no long term stability will want to change jobs or even industries.

Development

LTA provides a framework based on the accumulation of assessed knowledge and skills and encourages continual professional development.

Training is the key to keeping abreast with the ever advancing levels of technology and legislation within the industry and the development of professional staff. The advancement of technology will not stop, only become faster. To support the technology of today and the future it is no longer acceptable that education stops when an apprentice leaves college.

LTA 2 is benchmarked at the advanced modern apprenticeship or extended diploma qualification; LTA 3 and LTA 4 exceed these levels and are in place to build on the

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technician's knowledge and skill levels to allow engagement with the latest technology.

LTA accreditation of training provision ensures that industry standards are maintained and improved; it offers the opportunity for independent and manufacturer's training providers to assist technicians supporting their products to progress through the LTA pathway and gain recognition for their expertise.

Why is LTA necessary?

The land-based engineering industry faces severe competition from many other industries who also seek high calibre engineering technicians. Many competitive industries are comprised of larger businesses having professional recruitment capabilities, some enjoying higher public awareness, having a sexier image or a clear profile of engagement with high technology.

Our industry although relatively small is extremely diverse, engaged in the provision of food for the table, the production and processing of timber, environmental management and municipal maintenance not forgetting the professional turf and amenities industries.

The economic pressures and production demands placed upon the land-based engineering sector have necessitated technical innovation which now both shares and exceeds the level of technology found within other industries. This is generally not appreciated by those who have no connection with the industry.

In order to support the industry's customers it is vital that a higher calibre of recruit is attracted and retained within the industry. The LTA career pathway to professional recognition status is an important part of this objective.

LTA provides an opportunity to demonstrate to prospective employees the prospects, diversity, challenges and the opportunities available from a career within the industry.

Who benefits from LTA?

THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE!

LTA raises the profile of the industry and the career prospects and opportunities within it aiding the recruitment, retention and development of a higher calibre of technician.

It is essential that technicians' professional competence is encouraged to enable the support of advanced innovation both when supplied new and also as technology enters the used equipment market.

It is foreseeable that in future smaller importers and dealerships may find it difficult to support high technology product if technician development is not actively encouraged.

There is already evidence of a multi-tiered educational system in land-based engineering which is dependent on who employs the apprentice / technician and the additional training resources made available by the employers retained franchises. Whilst this may suit some manufacturers and their commercial aspirations it is not a solution currently available to industry as a whole.

The availability of both a manufacturer's and an independent LTA career pathway encourages industry technicians to accrue continual professional development training credits no matter how large or small their employer may be.

THE TECHNICIAN

- LTA provides recognition and acknowledgement of the work experience, personal skills and knowledge accrued and leads to a professional identity.
- Greater job satisfaction through recognition and respect of expertise from employers, colleagues and customers
- Continual professional development opportunities
- Greater career prospects and earning potential
- Less work related stress
- Greater self esteem, confidence and professional assertiveness



THE EMPLOYER

- LTA demonstrates to customers, suppliers and staff a commitment to excellence
- Improves the professional perception of the company and the services offered
- Provides a career path for employees and therefore aids staff retention
- Encourages customer loyalty and satisfaction
- Perhaps most importantly provides justification for a realistic charge out rate for the professional services supplied
- Aids profitability, drives down repair bill disputes, repair come-backs, untimely warranty claims, lost and dissatisfied customers and reduces the time wasted in handling disputes.
- Provides greater opportunities for repeat and conquest sales

- Aids company efficiency and profitability

THE CUSTOMER

- LTA inspires confidence in the quality of service support offered knowing that technician's skills and knowledge are benchmarked against an industry standard.
- Reassurance that LTA technicians are bound by a professional code of conduct
- Efficient diagnosis and timely repairs assisting in driving equipment whole life operating costs down
- Higher profitability through minimal downtime and subsequent crop loss
- Availability of professional opinion and technical advice from informed technicians
- Optimal outputs and minimal input costs from machinery correctly commissioned and serviced

MANUFACTURERS AND SUPPLIERS

- Confidence that the end user and your product will receive professional support in the field
- Protection of product reputation
- Reduced possibilities of conflict and litigation
- Reduced warranty costs following delivery of product into service
- Increased possibilities of future product sales and customer retention

ROUTES TO LTA Manufacturer or Independent?

All references to the Independent LTA Route refer to technicians who have applied for LTA 2 & LTA 3 recognition through an Independent Assessment Centre

The term 'Independent LTA Routes' does not imply and should not be interpreted as being for applicants working independent of an employer.

It refers solely to the fact that applicants are applying for LTA consideration 'independent' of an approved manufacturer's scheme.

LTA 1 and LTA 2 requirements are identical for Independent and Manufacturers routes.

The MANUFACTURER LTA 3 Route

Manufacturer's LTA schemes are delivered through their own training facilities. In all cases these will have been assessed and

accredited as assessment centres for their own respective networks.

These schemes are well established and based on the manufacturer's specific product and training pathways. However the same generic technical and soft skills requirements are applied to both Independent and Manufacturer LTA qualified personnel.

The attainment of a manufacturer specific LTA 3 is focused on their own products and dealer networks. Therefore all manufacturers approved schemes are subject to a minimum audited standard implemented by the IAgrE. To ensure parity the same standards and rigor of audit are applied to the Independent LTA 3 route.

In manufacturer's schemes LTA 3 status is awarded in recognition of meeting manufacturer specific product knowledge requirements. LTA 3 status is therefore dependent on the technician continuing to work within the manufacturer's dealer network and the continual updating of their product knowledge.

The INDEPENDENT LTA 3 Route



The Independent LTA 3 route comprises of the successful achievement of on-line knowledge assessment modules covering mandatory generic core subjects.

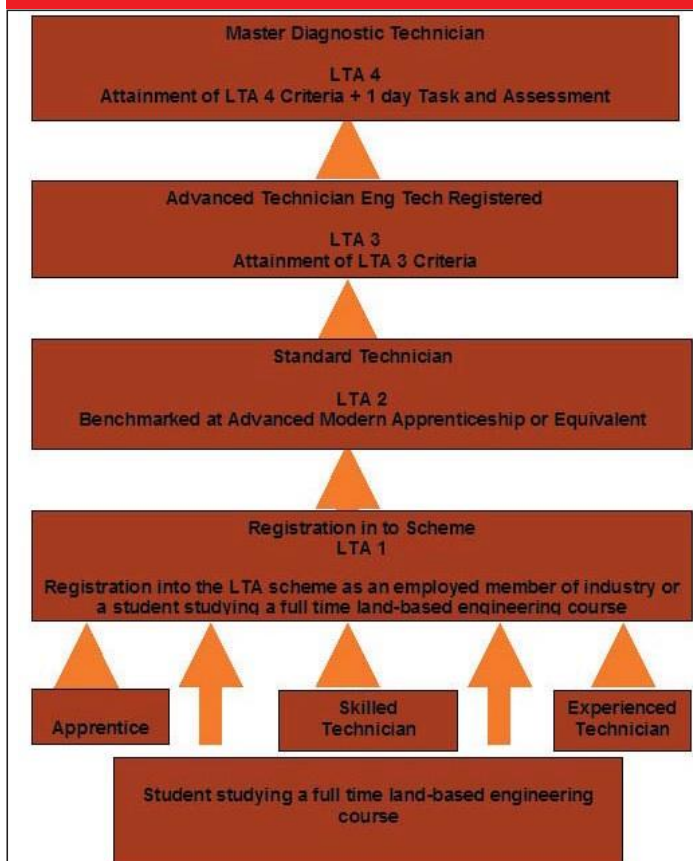
Additionally personal skill development must be demonstrated through the successful completion of training courses delivered by an accredited LTA training provider.

The candidate must accumulate a minimum number of training credits to achieve LTA 3 recognition. Training credits may be accrued from a variety of LTA accredited training providers facilitating the opportunity for dealerships and their technicians to plan training to achieve LTA 3 status based on the products and services supplied.

Further Independent LTA 3 criteria details can be found in the chart on the opposite page

A fundamental difference between the independent LTA route and the manufacturer's LTA route is that Independent LTA 3 status is attained through achievement of generic requirements, it is not based on one

LTA PATHWAY



Prerequisites For LTA 3 Application		
Valid LTA 2 registration	Mandatory	
Minimum of 3 years continuous employment with a proven track record in the land-based engineering service industry	Mandatory	
Knowledge Assessment Requirements On-line, face to face or distance learning packages assessed in the following subjects		
Advanced electrics and electronics including diagnostics	Pass Mark Threshold	75%
Advanced hydraulics including diagnostics	Pass Mark Threshold	75%
Engine and transmission technology	Pass Mark Threshold	75%
Face to Face Professional Interview	Mandatory	
Skills Assessment requirements In the case of technical training candidates are to be assessed on a pass – fail basis during the attendance of training provision delivered by an LTA accredited provider. LTA 3 applicants must have accrued a minimum total of 60 training credits achieved in a period not exceeding 5 years preceding the date of application for registration		
	Minimum credits of which 10 credits to be achieved in a soft skills category	Total 60 Credits Minimum
	1 hours training = 1 credit	
Skills Category (examples) Specialist training e.g. air conditioning, brake testing, sprayer testing etc. Whole goods manufacturer's product training modules OEM assembly and subassembly training modules		
	Training credits may be accrued from a multiple of training providers	50 Credits Minimum
Soft Skills Category (examples) Customer care Information Technology and communication Time management Machinery and equipment installation and commissioning procedures Health & Safety management First Aid Team leadership		
		10 Credits Minimum

INDEPENDENT LTA 3 FRAMEWORK OF REQUIREMENT: Please note that LTA 1 and 2 are identical for Manufacturer or Independent routes

product specific training provider and therefore remains in place should the technician move to another employer who has no access to a manufacturer's LTA scheme.

The Independent route to LTA is immediately available at LTA 1 & 2.

LTA 1 registration is free and is a case of logging onto the IAgRE website following the LTA link and filling in the online registration form. Any technician employed within the industry can register. It's the starting point of the career pathway.

A NEW initiative in the process of being introduced is the invitation of all students following a full time land-based engineering qualification to register at LTA 1, it is hoped that colleges will incorporate this into their enrolment procedures.

Independent LTA 2 is immediately available and the requirements are identical to the Manufacturer's LTA 2 scheme.

Those wishing to apply for Independent LTA 2 accreditation should do so via the website or through Barony College if locat-

ed in Scotland. LTA 2 accreditation carries with it a nominal processing charge which covers the verification of attainment of the LTA 2 criteria, production and issuing of the personalised LTA identification card and maintaining the LTA register entry.

Independent LTA 3 is in the process of having the online assessment criteria formulated. The hydraulic draft assessment has been compiled and is awaiting validation. The rest will follow over the coming months, it must be remembered to formulate 1 hour of Moodle based online assessment or tutorial takes 100 hours of input work.

This work is being carried out by Barony College who have been appointed the Industry's LTA 2 and LTA 3 Independent Assessment Centre. It is an absolute testament to Barony College's commitment to the provision of land-based engineering excellence that this investment is being made in times of severe financial restraint.

Will LTA accreditation cost money?

Of course it will! Training and assessment costs money! Professional registration costs

money! Professionalism costs money!

All these costs can be budgeted for and will add value to the company services. When broken down into cost per hour of labour sold it is negligible and is easily recoverable. Having over 40 years experience and responsibility for the provision of service excellence you could not convince me otherwise.

Whilst you are thinking about the changes that will affect your business also think about what it will cost to lose a franchise, how much it will cost to replace a technician, what the cost of losing a customer will be, and finally how will you support the products and services you provide if you can't recruit high calibre staff.

If you require further information or would like to discuss LTA, or perhaps you are a manufacturer or training provider who would like to enquire about training provision accreditation, contact me mrdkirschner@btinternet.com



DAVID KIRSCHNER was raised on a farm but always preferred four-wheels to four legs. He completed an apprenticeship at a Massey Ferguson dealership which included attending Lackham College. After which he went to a Deutz dealership as Service Manager before joining Fendt importer Bill Bennett Engineering, becoming Technical Director.

Following the change in Fendt distribution, he was approached by Renault Agriculture to oversee all the

sales / service operations. When Renault was acquired by Claas in 2004, he worked as a consultant to Claas UK ensuring the continuity of Renault Agriculture products.

Since 2005, he has worked as a consultant to industry organisations such as LANTRA, City & Guilds, IMI, AEA, BAGMA and IAgRE. David lives in Glastonbury, Somerset and currently works as an independent consultant to the LTA scheme.