

# Case Study

## Autotech



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**Andy Robinson**  
Chief Executive - Autotech

When his company had to turn away around £10m worth of business because he couldn’t get the right skills or the right people, Andy Robinson knew he had to act.

**The chief executive of Autotech realised his company had to do more to grow its own talent to capitalise on these opportunities, but didn’t know how.**

Until 2011 he had never even heard of Semta, the sector skills council for science, engineering and advanced manufacturing. Now his company has a fruitful partnership with Semta, which is starting to make a real difference to the business.

“I was at the Manufacturing Britain event where Semta’s UK operations director Lynn Tomkins was speaking,” he said. “She was telling the audience many wonderful examples of the big companies Semta was working with.

“She also mentioned work with SMEs so I grabbed her afterwards and said ‘given the things she was talking about were so relevant why had we, the largest independent control systems centre in the UK, not heard of Semta?’”

Since then Autotech has formed a strong partnership with, and Mr Robinson has become an advocate of, Semta.

A formal structured approach to recruitment and development was drawn up which saw 70 young people tested and interviewed for engineering apprenticeships.

In October 2012 the first 21 recruits entered the newly-created Autotech Academy to be trained to meet demand from clients in automotive, logistics, airports, food & beverage, metals, utilities, oil & gas, mining & aggregates and power generation industries.

The initiative was made possible thanks to investment from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills through their Employer Investment Fund (EIF). The EIF is designed to drive employer-led action leading to increased ambition, skills investment and the better use of skills to achieve measurable increases in enterprise, employment opportunities and economic growth.



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Semta is helping deliver the Advanced Apprenticeships, Higher Apprenticeships and Graduate Programme offered by the academy.

Mr Robinson said: “Apprentices are essential to our future. We always took three or four on every year but I felt we needed to do more to do something on a much bigger scale.

“I want to be in a position where 10% of the workforce is made up of apprentices. Our academy initiative has taken us to about 8%.

“It has not been easy – it requires investment, restructuring and commitment – but it is the right thing to do, if we are to sustain our business growth of more than 20% year on year.

“Our academy will provide structured training to fast-track both school leavers and graduates. We will gain high calibre engineers to ensure the business can continue to expand and help the young people gain nationally recognised qualifications and transferable skills while earning a proper salary in a cutting edge technology business”.

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Based in Silsoe, Bedford and Birmingham, Autotech acquired Igranit Control Systems Ltd and PSJ Fabrications Ltd in early 2012 to form the Automated Technology Group Limited.

The group with a combined turnover of around £35 million now has more than 350 engineers and technicians with a wide range of skills, including welding, fabrication, electrical engineering, mechanical design, software/robot programming, electrical assembly and installation.



If you would like further information on how Semta can help you please contact:

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Mr Robinson likens his business to the inside of a computer – not being the visible brand but providing the vital component to help the systems people encounter every day run smoothly.

“Whether it is at Heathrow’s Terminal 5, Jaguar Land Rover, BMW, Cadbury’s, Amazon, Asda, Scottish Power or Thames Water, wherever, we are helping to make their systems work to the maximum potential,” he said.

He is now working with Semta to recruit five graduates and is very interested in the innovative Advanced Skills Accreditation Scheme that will allow him to put employees with no prerequisite qualifications to study individual Master’s level modules that are applicable to his business which will help him upskill his existing workforce.

Bill Twigg, Semta’s apprenticeship director, said: “The Autotech Academy is an excellent example of how SMEs can respond to the skills challenge. We are delighted that ATG has taken on 21 apprentices who we will support through a combination of on-the-job training and technical learning to acquire the skills, knowledge and confidence required for a successful career in engineering.

“There is plenty of evidence that the benefits far outweigh the costs which is why we need to do all we can to support SMEs.

“An apprentice may not always contribute toward the business in year one but in years two, three and four they make a major contribution. They become a valued, loyal employee, making money and providing skills, which have been home grown.

“Employers are struggling to get the skilled people they need, yet youth unemployment remains high. There has never been a better time to bring these issues together to meet the challenge head on.

“We are working hard to make it easier for employers of all sizes to take on apprentices, from securing quality candidates to developing the frameworks that truly add value to businesses. Our work with ATG is an excellent example of this in action.”