

Showing continued initiative

Former senior operations manager at West Midlands business support activity Accelerate, David Malpass, reviews the past 10 years of the initiative, and looks ahead

I've been at Accelerate (www.accelerate.uk.net) for over 10 years and during that time I've witnessed everything the automotive industry can throw at you, including major factory closures, exciting new model launches and the emergence of third world countries that are doing their best to muscle in on our territory.

However, during this time I've been refreshed, energised and encouraged to see how suppliers have responded with the latest manufacturing practices, innovation and a willingness to ditch reputations and concentrate on carving their own legacies in the industry.

Having seen such an eventful decade, it is with a great deal of sadness that I announced my resignation as senior operations manager at Accelerate.

I genuinely feel that we are now one of the UK's most successful business support organisations and thanks to our ability to evolve we have been able to offer suppliers the level of specialist assistance they rightfully demand. To date we have worked with over 4,000 companies, safeguarded and created in excess of 60,000 jobs and put plans down for the automotive sector going forward.

We have also been at the forefront of manufacturing support, through business development grants, capital equipment funding and the world class Supply Chain Improvement programme – who would have thought suppliers could work



together to boost performance?

From here we launched collaborative networks, technology transfer centres and, in response to international demand, AutoZone (www.abdn.uk.net/Autozone.htm) is now offering a link into over £500 million of European opportunities.

We have managed to give the industry hope and genuine relish for the future and I know that we will continue to play a major role in new technologies and high quality parts and meet the challenge of the global marketplace.

Accelerate has played a role in the transformation of the West Midlands auto industry, yet it is the companies in the region that make the biggest

difference and I genuinely believe we can continue to be a world leader in innovation, alternative fuels technology and design. Management teams now understand the implications of global business and are looking at how they can use their company's skills and expertise to move into new international markets.

The culture found in the new breed of suppliers can equally be found in the actual manufacturing process, scheduling and technology. We've even seen firms working together and this honesty and willingness to pool talents has been an overwhelming success.

The general consensus that the UK cannot compete has been disproved and we are now entering a period that offers an equal measure of opportunities and threats.

I am confident that we have the innovation and commitment to remain a major force in the automotive sector and I don't seem to be the only one, with Honda, BMW, Nissan and Toyota all enjoying success at their UK plants.

But if there is one warning to be heeded, then it is not to focus purely on the domestic sector. The way communication and travel is developing means that it is just as easy to supply factories in Brazil and Mexico as it is those in Swindon and Burnaston.□

** Rachel Eade, previously programme manager, succeeds Mr Malpass at Accelerate.*

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