

# A chance to address the biggest challenge on our horizon, the skills gap — Joe Pacitti

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As a group of industry sectors - everything from food and drink, transport, defence, aerospace, electronics... in fact almost too many to mention, some areas have had more challenges or opportunities than others. As an overall balance, there has been a reasonable level of resilience shown and it might be safe to say that the future challenges and opportunities were already mapped out prior to Covid-19 and Brexit - the focus and priority mix may have some slight changes to this.

this year presents a chance to make a concerted effort to address the skills gap. This, arguably, is the biggest challenge on our horizon. Global shortages of skilled labour as well the continuing challenge of attracting newcomers of all groups and genders into STEM related careers is not new, however, the pandemic may have accelerated a few skilled workers to consider work life balance and even taking early retirement.

We don't need to be radical in our approach. We simply need to embrace a 'grass roots' approach helps to raise the level of skills through a variety of different avenues. Through such excellent bodies such as the Developing the Young Workforce regional programmes and similar graduate apprenticeship initiatives, young people have a golden opportunity to see what the manufacturing industry in Scotland can offer them.

Moreover, bringing together a skills academy and a centre for manufacturing excellence through the creation of The National Manufacturing Institute of Scotland (NMIS) and The Manufacturing Skills Academy will propel Scottish manufacturing into 2022 with fulfilled hope and expectation.

However, I would urge that our further education and higher education sectors help us to shape the thinking for the future of the manufacturing industry in Scotland. Their curricula help create the pathways that point the next generation of apprentices and graduates into our industry and, importantly, arms them with

so much of the new innovation skills and technologies that we need to keep pace with the continuing migration to manufacturing automation.

Additionally, CeeD — the Centre for Engineering Education & Development — plays a vital role along focusing on practical peer to peer learning and sharing of best practice provide this additional backdrop and support to learning and upskilling.

Learning new skills in the right areas are key - there is definitely still a place for traditional skills to support the manufacturing community, but increasingly digital skills are the future. These growing skills sets are required for the productivity gain in new investment and technology in areas such as robotics, automation visualisation, data management and cyber security. Every sector or area of manufacturing is moving in this direction - productivity gain and dealing with skills shortages but also the ability to deliver output in a greener more sustainable way.

Perhaps this means that new skills and up-skilling, digital transformation, sustainability, and the low carbon agenda are wrapped in a triple helix of challenge and opportunity globally - but made in Scotland!

Our nation is already showing leadership and influence with clusters of new future sectors appearing through start-ups or with existing businesses diversifying. The ability to support this change through integration and partnerships in the supply chain will support these new opportunities.

Scotland already has a significant level of resource from government providing policy and funding and supported by government agencies and academia, all working to support this future. This is ably supported by many leading industrial organisations of all sizes coming together in small dynamic pilots collaborating in innovation and commercial supply chains.

All of this is providing the early sparks for the future of manufacturing to be more sustainable and dynamic.

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