

Case Study

Sterling Plastering Ltd

Delivery Partner



Background

Sterling Plastering Ltd was founded IN 2016 by Chris Cox and Jeff Murphy and has since grown to service nearly every national house builder across the North West. The company's long-term goal is to establish itself as the largest and safest plastering service provider in the region, catering to residential and commercial clients.

Their expertise covers all aspects of plastering, dry lining, screeding, and rendering across commercial, industrial, and domestic markets, including plastering/boarding, taping/jointing, metal stud partitions, coving, MF ceilings, all rendering systems, plaster patching, and screeding.

Currently, the workforce consists of approximately 200 staff on a combination of self-employed and employed contracts, with numbers continuing to rise as the business expands. As part of its commitment to workforce development and local economic growth, Sterling Plastering is in the process of establishing a Training Academy at its Knowsley site. This new academy will provide dedicated training for apprentice plasterers within the Liverpool City Region, a much-needed service in an area where such training opportunities are currently limited.

Challenge

The UK's construction industry has historically relied on traditional wet trades such as plastering and bricklaying, contributing over £25 billion in Gross Value Added (Balanced) to the Liverpool City Region over the past 20 years. However, the sector is facing a widening skills gap due to an ageing workforce and a lack of new talent entering the trade. Despite the urgent need for training facilities, financial support for academies and training providers remains scarce.

Solution

The LJMU Horizons team visited the Sterling Plastering site, identifying multiple opportunities for innovation and operational enhancements. Sterling Plastering had recently relocated to new premises, designed to function as both the headquarters for its commercial and domestic operations, as well as a training centre in collaboration with Hugh Baird College. The objective of this new facility was to offer work-based training leading to a Level 2 qualification in plastering, with students expected to attend on-site for at least two and a half days each week.

Case Study

Sterling Plastering Ltd

Delivery Partner



To support the academy development and align it with the company's long-term strategic growth, Sterling Plastering required assistance in improving office systems, information technology, student teaching and learning facilities and front-of-house digital infrastructure. The Horizons project recommended adopting innovative technological approaches to enhance training delivery and operational efficiency.

The Horizons team played a crucial role in developing and implementing a digitalisation strategy for Sterling Plastering, leading to the creation of a Hybrid Digital Campus. This initiative connected the Knowsley training facility with the digital and on-site assets of Hugh Baird College in Bootle, providing a seamless learning experience for apprentices.

A comprehensive technological review of current systems and workflows revealed opportunities for enhancement. With the support of successful grant funding, the company successfully established a fully integrated online learning facility for its work-based training academy. This digital platform facilitates the delivery of NVQ and City & Guilds qualifications within an inclusive, technology-driven learning environment. The incorporation of digital teaching resources has enabled remote assessments for learners, significantly enhancing accessibility and efficiency.

Acknowledging the difficulties of establishing a contemporary digital academy, the Horizons team offered valuable insights on seamlessly integrating technology into the training and upskilling of local students.

This initiative also encouraged collaborations with nearby educational institutions, combining simulated hands-on training with mentorship and real-world experience. Furthermore, they provided additional support to enhance the future delivery of critical digital skills, including initial screening assessments and personalised online learning plans for apprentices.

Impact

The Horizons project has enhanced Sterling Plastering's digital capabilities, leading to the launch of the Hybrid Digital Campus. This initiative has allowed 15 new apprentices to receive on-site training with digital learning support. Grant funding has enabled the acquisition of advanced teaching equipment and the introduction of online platforms, enhancing training quality and engagement.

The newly established Sterling Plastering Training Academy aims to address the skills gap in the Liverpool City Region, providing essential skills for stable careers in construction. By incorporating modern digital techniques, the academy prepares apprentices for industry demands.

With the Hybrid Digital Campus operational, Sterling Plastering plans to expand training offerings and collaborate with Horizons and local educational institutions for further development and funding. Committed to workforce development, the academy sets a new standard for vocational training, reinforcing Sterling Plastering's leadership in construction and education.