

AutoRaise's new Managing Director, Emma Speed, took up her post in August.

NEW MD BUZZING ABOUT AUTORAISE ROLE

Emma Speed has enjoyed a varied career in which she has developed a deep passion for education and apprenticeships and worked closely with employers to enhance opportunities for young people and increase skills. Now the new Managing Director of AutoRaise, Emma, an avid beekeeper in her spare time, is aiming to create a buzz around the charity as part of ongoing efforts to attract a future generation of talent into the repair industry and address its skills shortage.

Your career started as a journalist for ITN and the BBC. How has your pathway now led to AutoRaise?

I think the common thread which led me here is people, telling their stories and a desire to make a difference. After I completed my role leading stakeholder management for the BBC Digital Switchover Help Scheme, I undertook a post grad in education in my late 30s. I was an apprentice myself and didn't need a degree because I was trained brilliantly on the job, but having a higher qualification later in life has helped me work with young people and become a lecturer, eventually working to set up apprenticeship trailblazers in the digital sector as well as develop award-winning training programmes for young people studying engineering. I learnt a lot from working in the discipline and with the Royal Academy of Engineers to gain funding for an initiative to get more female engineers into employment. I moved into my current role with AutoRaise in August, and I've been amazed by the support and commitment from those across the industry to future-proof it by bringing in new talent as well as the support for the important role AutoRaise can play in achieving that.

You have extensive experience of working in education so how will this assist you in your first automotive role?

I think there are many relevant challenges I have experienced working in education; a key one being the need to capture sufficient funding for training and keep up with industry relevant knowledge exchange. A big part of my previous role was also to engage with industry leaders to utilise their expertise and mentorship for young people. As I relaunch AutoRaise with the board, I think there are many parallels which will allow me to draw on this experience.

> **"The trustees and I are working closely on changes with a plan to relaunch AutoRaise during National Apprenticeship Week in February"**

[continued on page 67]

[continued from page 65]

What attracted you to join AutoRaise?

The opportunity to continue my passion for engaging young people as well as my experience working in a sector, I previously knew nothing about, having worked closely with engineers in industry and education. A huge part of my job satisfaction since I started with AutoRaise in August has been meeting new people and learning so much about accident repair and the challenges faced across the sector. I hope I can dispel some of the perceptions of the industry and bring fresh perspective to AutoRaise.

How have you spent your first three months in post?

Listening! I wanted to consult industry leaders and bodyshops to learn from them what they need from a charity which will represent the needs of business and new people coming in. I have been conducting interviews with leaders and have sent out a questionnaire to bodyshops asking what their barriers are to taking on new apprentices. I have also been visiting businesses and education providers across the country to get to know people and raise the profile of AutoRaise. I have had such a warm welcome and there is a lot of support to develop AutoRaise further.

Have your impressions of the accident repair sector changed during that time?

We have a family friend who runs his own bodyshop and I think that gave me some insight about what it really involves, the pressures and challenges. I think I have been able to learn more about the breadth of the industry from large insurers to small bodyshop owners and the different challenges presented across the scale. I think an important thing I have also learnt is what a great career people can have in bodyshop repair and the variety of roles available within it.

Can we expect any changes to the way AutoRaise operates under your stewardship and have there been any developments since your appointment?

Watch this space! The trustees and I are working closely on changes with a plan to relaunch AutoRaise during National Apprenticeship Week in February. It's important that we create a way for those who donate to AutoRaise to see the impact their donation makes as well as increasing the diversity of the organisation.



Amongst her early duties, Emma *(pictured fifth from the left)* was invited to sit on the judging panel for this year's Steer Apprentice Awards.

Are you able to share any future plans?

All I would say is that any future plans will have been shaped by the consultation I have been holding with the industry. It's important that any changes meet the needs of the industry and the relaunched AutoRaise can make a clear and quick impact on skills gaps and raise awareness of the challenges the sector is facing.

What are your thoughts on the Government's recent apprenticeship reforms?

I think it is encouraging that discussions about the funding of training and reshaping the levy have begun at Government level, but there needs to be a specific industry focus and AutoRaise is supporting Thatcham's campaign to "Fix the Levy" to raise the profile of the skills gaps being faced by the sector as well as the low level of levy funding available for bodyshop training providers.

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What are the challenges facing AutoRaise as a charity?

I think to change perceptions of the industry – the old Grant and Phil Mitchell/Eastenders image some young people and parents have of the job and to increase the number of businesses who will take on apprentices, overcoming concerns about apprentices slowing them down and sharing positive lived experiences and stories from those who have benefited hugely from taking on an apprentice.

And finally, the big question, what steps need to be taken for the repair industry to increase its appeal to young people and secure a greater talent pool to fill not only the many current vacancies but safeguard the sector's future in the longer term?

I think to raise awareness of the career opportunities (and salaries!) available if you are successful in completing an apprenticeship. More sharing of applicants between large and smaller businesses so that there is a ready-made talent pool available for wider recruitment to make it quicker and easier to fill roles. I think there are also opportunities to attract people who want to change their current employment outside the industry and move across into an apprenticeship position. Also taking some of the pain away from the admin side of applying for levy funding as well as encouraging larger employers to share their levy funding with their supply chain, creating more roles.