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Government-backed ReMIT has been offering young people apprenticeships in motor-vehicle maintenance for the last 30 years. But, when the organisation opened a state-of-the-art technical-training centre, it needed equipment to match, and turned to Hitachi.

The company's interactive whiteboards have transformed ReMIT's lessons, with classes using every aspect of the boards: saving work, the Internet, PowerPoint, even simple spirit-pen use. The boards have been so successful that ReMIT has even rolled one out to Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, with impressive results.

## **For some organisations, apprenticeships have never been away**

Suddenly, apprenticeships for young adults are big news again. At the latest party conference, the Prime Minister welcomed them back like an old friend, promising 300,000 workplace apprenticeships for young people. It's a position backed up by a big-budget national advertising campaign that has caught the imagination of employers large and small.

But, for some organisations, apprenticeships have never been away. ReMIT, a Government-backed body training young people in motor-vehicle maintenance, has embraced vocational training for the last 30 years.

Every year, ReMIT offers 10,000 people aged 16 to 25 industry-approved Modern Apprenticeships, for ten weeks, spread over three years.



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## Best equipment for state-of-the-art centre

When ReMIT opened a state-of-the-art training centre in Croydon, South London, Centre Manager Mike Gibbins had three reasons for wanting only the best equipment. ReMIT was now known as a 'centre of excellence'; it was in direct competition with other colleges; and it was dealing with prestige manufacturers like Ford, Jaguar and Ferrari - so Mike had a powerful need to be taken seriously.

"We used to take our courses out into the colleges," he said. "It was all chalk and talk. But we wanted to bring the learning experience to the learner - to go upmarket. We needed something to take us up a level."

After scouring the Internet and talking to resellers, Mike decided on interactive whiteboards: "We looked at other manufacturers. But we chose Hitachi because of their good name, their link with Cambridge University Press, and because, with everyone we talked to, the name came up time after time as a quality product."

Mike was so impressed that he bought nine Hitachi Cambridge whiteboards. "We now build lessons onto a central computer. Each teacher hooks up a laptop to the board and away they go. Everything is motor vehicle-oriented, but the board also helps us teach the key skills that the Government wants us to get across - Maths, IT and Communication Skills."

## The boards are the main focus of classroom teaching

Mike finds that the boards are now the main focus of classroom teaching: "They've been a huge benefit. Students love the electronic pen, and they and the teachers use everything the board has to offer: saving work, the projection screen, PowerPoint presentations, the spirit pen and the Internet. The big plan is to build a database of engineering parts, like pistons and cylinder heads, that we can call up at any time."

Where students might once have stared blankly at a chalkboard, lessons are now much more interactive. Teachers might encourage them to come forward and complete a mathematical formula involving compression ratios, or fill in the blanks on a technical drawing. Students put their name beside their work, it's saved and can be compared against future work on the same subject. Result: an electronic barometer of progress.

The boards are also useful for presentations, tests and for exploring websites not available to the public: "If we're looking at a Mercedes fuel-injection system," said Mike. "We have permission from Mercedes-Benz to enter their technical site - so we get a blown-up, detailed look at the fuel system."

For Mike, this is one of the biggest advantages of the boards - instead of seeing images on a small screen, his pupils view them on a giant board. "They're also particularly helpful for our slower learners. Instead of drawings on a board that can be erased, we save their work and their thoughts, which is great for revision. The best thing is that they lose their fear of asking, 'Can we go back -- I didn't quite get that?' - because we can go back. The boards help them overcome that fear. And that's priceless."

## A revolution in young-offender teaching

The Croydon boards have been so successful that Hitachi has sponsored another whiteboard at Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre. ReMIT trains around 50 young people in mechanical skills at Feltham each year at a specially constructed centre sponsored by Ford. The centre is a source of great pride to both staff and inmates and the enthusiasm is obvious to all who have the privilege to visit. "Its brilliant, just brilliant" enthused one pupil, "I'm hoping to use the skills I'm learning to get work in the future."

Said Mike: "Feltham can be a demanding place to teach, but the whiteboard has really helped us". Some of the young people are quite challenged in reading and writing and others do not speak English as their first language. But, because the board is pictorial, it's a huge step forward. We can now retain interest for much longer and use alternative ways to get messages across."

ReMIT and Ford are clearly helping to build an education programme at Feltham, and perhaps something even greater - a helping hand to a bright future for young people determined to make a new start.

**Hitachi Software  
Engineering (UK) Limited**  
19 Heather Park Drive  
Wembley, London, HA0 1SS  
Tel: +44-20-8902-1286  
www.hitachisoft-eu.com  
info@hitachisoft-eu.com

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[www.cambridgeboard.com](http://www.cambridgeboard.com)