

# Opportunity knocks as schools strive for clean air

The privately owned manufacturer of air distribution products GDL which was acquired as part of a family run operation in 2004 is making the Government's aim to ensure schools are ventilated to EU standards works in its favour, as demand for its unique natural ventilation products grows. HVR spoke to commercial director **Paul Callaghan**



GDL's products are divided into four segments, grilles, diffusers, louvres and natural ventilation (intelivent). Examples of GDL's work are pictured here

**THE COMPANY** which has grown and innovated substantially in the past 10 years had not taken long to identify the growth potential in the schools' market, according to Callaghan.

"We have spent a lot of time researching the marketplace trying to get to grips with what sort of products we could develop which would suit a certain market. In the UK a lot of industries and sectors are quite saturated but we found that the schools' market has a high level of investment from government money.

"So we developed a product range around natural ventilation

in 2009/2010 with the idea to try and enter the market when we saw the level of investment going into it. With the Government's aim to improve UK schools which were falling below specific EU standards for clean air and ventilation, we developed a product range that was very much targeted at the education sector."

GDL's intelivent range is said to lower energy consumption, operating and maintenance costs in all building types. The concept is to create a stack effect through the space, controlling the incoming air temperature and CO2 levels in order to maintain a comfortable

environment with the correct air temperature and velocity with a controlled seasonal ventilation rate.

"Our intelivent range or natural ventilation products are a carbon neutral way of ventilating a school classroom with zero costs to operate," says Callaghan.

GDL now has a significant workload in the education sector with work undertaken at schools/academies/institutions across the country including Sheffield University; Stockland Green Technology College in Birmingham; John Leggot College in North Lincolnshire; HML School based in Birmingham;

Chetham's School of Music based in Manchester; Hertfordshire University Law Block; Chiltern Hills Academy in Chesham and Shirebrook Academy based in Mansfield.

## Core business

GDL manufactures ventilation products predominantly serving the construction industry.

"We are involved in anything that moves air or where there's air movement in buildings," says Callaghan.

GDL has four clear segments in its product range; grilles, diffusers, louvres and natural ventilation.



• **Grilles and diffusers** – The company manufactures a range of supply and extract grilles and diffusers for all building types.

Callaghan says, while it offers an economy range of products in these sectors, it has found a niche for its bespoke range of products in high-end projects such as The Savoy Hotel in London and the London 2012 Olympics sports venues.

• **Louvres** – GDL's range of standard and bespoke aluminium louvers are said to be aesthetically pleasing and offer rain defence while providing the necessary ventilation requirements. They are suitable for varied applications including commercial retail, health and industrial capacities.

• **Natural ventilation** – The natural ventilation products (intelivent) are designed and installed in commercial buildings, education and health facilities as well as supermarkets, distribution centres, warehouses, sport facilities and assembly areas. A projects division deals with the natural ventilation products which tend to be more consultant led.

Products are manufactured in house putting GDL in a good position in the marketplace as the company is able to tailor products to what the customer wants.

### Innovation is key

Callaghan says GDL's success in the past 10 years has been its willingness to find and enter new markets, a plan which has put the company on a solid footing.

"During the recession we tried to grow and we were quite

ambitious and invested even though times were tough. Any company that did okay during the leaner years had to reinvent itself a little bit and incorporate new products for new markets and new customers.

"Our biggest challenge has been the margin squeeze. The marketplace is competitive and there have been cost pressures from all angles. We try to protect our margins by negotiating harder with our supplier base and being more efficient in our manufacturing process but we also know that innovation drives margins."

### The future:

Despite a disappointing turnover year as a result of projects being postponed in 2013, GDL is upbeat about this year as those projects are now starting to be reinstated and the company is in line to experience its best quarter in 10 years.

In addition GDL is starting to see long-term consultant-led projects, in which it worked alongside consultants to incorporate its designs into particular solutions, coming to fruition

"Our aim is to try to drive extra volume from projects we've developed such as intelivent and also to maintain steady growth in our core range of products where the market may be more saturated.

"We will keep innovating and actively pursue increased growth certainly in the schools market. In five years time we expect 60 to 70 per cent of our turnover to be coming from that market.

"Everything is picking up now and we are quite confident that we're going to have a good few years," concludes Callaghan.

## Some facts about GDL

- GDL was acquired in 2004.
- It's main production facility is in the Peak District in a town called Glossop, historically a tourist/farming area as opposed to an industrial area.
- It has invested in another production facility based in Sheffield.
- It is a community-based business with the majority of its 63 employees living locally at both the Derbyshire and Sheffield operations.
- It is described as a family-orientated business with a number of families who work with the company in different positions.
- In 2009 the company decided to grow the business in the London area and it now has a small sales office in London as well as sales representatives in Glasgow and Bristol.
- A growth plan, put in place five years ago to double its turnover by 2014, was close to reaching its mark.