Movement To Work Awards Submission 2022

Category: **Employer of the Year**

An organisation affiliated with Movement to Work which has had a significant impact on young people in the UK. This employer can show evidence of being innovative in their approach to support young people into employment during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Why do you believe this person (or organisation) should be celebrated for their work and success in making a difference to young people? Where possible, make specific reference to challenges posed by COVID-19 and how these were overcome:

No max words, please structure this as you see fit including relevant context and evidence where necessary. Please email any further information (e.g. statistics, case studies, photos) to info@movementtowork.com

**Strategic context**

Thames Water is the UK’s biggest water and wastewater services provider. We have over 6,500 hardworking and dedicated staff, these key workers provide essential services around the clock to 15 million customers across London, the Thames Valley and surrounding areas.  For an average of just over £1 a day for our households, we provide 2.6 billion litres of drinking water and safely remove 4.6 billion litres of wastewater every day.  We invested more than £1 billion in our infrastructure in 2019/20, leading to a total of £16 billion in the past 16 years, and we will continue to spend wisely on improving resilience, service and efficiency, as well as provide more support for customers in vulnerable circumstances.  We also have additional responsibilities to society and the natural environment. What we do and how we do it delivers significant public value, which is why we have ambitious plans to self-generate more of our own power, reduce our carbon emissions and increase biodiversity across our sites.

One of the biggest people challenges for Thames Water is securing the core skills required in the business today and for the future; particularly those skills which are either industry specific or in high demand and short supply.

We have an opportunity to engage our workforce and ensure it is reflective and diverse of the local communities we serve.  We already have several great initiatives within the business; however, many projects are run independent of each other, with a limited joined up approach or strategy alignment. There is huge pride within Thames Water for being a custodian of the environment, we want to broaden this thinking to include benefits that can be offered to communities in terms of skills, jobs and careers. Diversity and Inclusion is well established across the business; however we want to create a more socio-economic diverse workforce that supports emerging talent strategies.

**Our Skills strategy**

In early 2021, Thames Water launched its new Skills and Emerging Talent strategy designed to support us in meeting our Purpose: to deliver life’s essential service, so our customers, communities and environment can thrive. The strategy sets us up for success both now and for the future. It enables us to be forward-thinking, considering both the short and long-term skills requirements for Thames Water as well as the external skills landscape and wider economic factors. A skilled workforce supported by a robust education and skills system will drive social mobility, promote inclusion and provide good work for all. We want to contribute to the creation of a fair society and tackle real challenges, such as digital skill shortages and in-work poverty, and ensure our people receive the right investment in skills development to have successful and sustainable careers.

Rationale for our Skills Strategy:

* Address the skills gap
* Build a pipeline of skills
* Meet public value commitments
* Increase socioeconomic diversity
* Positive engagement and enhancement of opportunity for the local community
* Grow local economy by developing local skills
* Enhanced employee engagement

The Skills strategy has been designed around four key principles:

* Principle 1: Improve the diversity of our workforce by building a pipeline of skills from local communities and the education sector
* Principle 2: Create careers, not just jobs, by investing in our people and fostering a culture of lifelong learning
* Principle 3: Establish sustainable strategic skills partnerships
* Principle 4: Adopt a leading position in the industry and with our supply chain on the development of skills

Our principles are underpinned by three core pillars:

1. Creating a strong support structure to deliver our strategy.
2. Creating a long-term view of skills through strategic workforce planning.
3. Equipping our leaders with the skills, knowledge, and behaviours they need to be effective.

*Please use this* [*link*](https://www.thameswater.co.uk/media-library/home/about-us/careers/skills-strategy.pdf) *to see our full Skills Strategy.*

**Strategic workforce profiling**

Our detailed strategic workforce profiling data was collated in late 2020 and highlighted key areas of focus taking into consideration internal workforce profiling needs as well as the external labour market.

The findings of our workforce profiling report highlighted that as a business we are not fully reflective of the diversity of the communities we serve. We also have an increasingly ageing workforce with a smaller younger demographic. These factors indicate the need to attract more young talent from our local communities, as well as serving a business need. This will support young people who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and enable Thames Water to create a more multi-generational workforce.

While youth unemployment was on the rise at that time, we were also conscious of other demographic groups of people that also face challenges, that would only be exacerbated by the pandemic. For example, people with a disability face challenges gaining employment; ex-military personnel are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as civilians; one in three of those living in care and ‘care leavers’ are not in education, employment or training; people with criminal convictions are still widely discriminated against, despite having the right to work; and refugees face barriers in terms of qualifications, language, and documentation.

We saw an opportunity to engage with this wider untapped talent pool allowing us to bring more diversity into the business while support socio economic prosperity for our communities.

**Creation of the Skills and Emerging Talent team**

To enable a successful implementation of the Skills strategy, a new Skills and Emerging Talent team was formed. It has grown over the last year and is a well- established team within the Thames Water People function that delivers excellent outcomes focused on careers not just jobs and driving meaningful sustainable change. These programmes in year 1 were seen as new initiatives and projects but are now being turned into ‘business as usual’ activities and how we bring talent into our business. The team own and lead the agenda, but critically it is Thames Water colleagues that support the delivery of the strategy by mentoring people into the business and creating sustainable opportunities for all.

**Building strategic partnerships to support young people**

Through the development of the Skills and Emerging Talent team, we have established strategic partnerships to support our local communities to access meaningful careers at Thames Water, including those members of the communities who have been disproportionately affected by the Covid pandemic. These partnerships are with several government-based organisations as well as private charities and companies. We have chosen to work with the selected partnerships due to the expertise they offer and alignment to our focus groups in year 1 such as care leavers, prison leavers, youth, refugees etc. As per Principle 3 of our Skills strategy- we are fully committed to building sustainable skills partnerships. Some examples of those partnerships are listed below:

**Our work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**

We have worked closely with the DWP at a strategic level as well as with local Job Centre Plus (JCP) on several of our employment projects. We signed up to Kickstart, with an initial commitment of 50 placements, which we doubled to 100 later in the year due to the immense success of the scheme at Thames Water. We have also successfully engaged with Sector Based Work Academy Programmes and Mentoring Circles.

**Signing up to Care Leaver Covenant**

In the Spring of 2021, we signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant. Our commitment to support Care Leavers includes:

* Guaranteed interview for all Care Leavers meeting basic criteria for the role
* Bespoke package of support for Care Leavers applying for our paid (living wage foundation level) summer internships
* Tailored employability interventions- working with the DWP and Swindon College to provide tailored support to Care Leavers to go into Customer Service positions within our Swindon contact centre
* Apprenticeships offering the opportunity for Care Leavers to be guaranteed an interview and to chat to one of our team if they are interested in applying for one of our apprenticeship schemes
* Our dedicated Kickstart Employability Trainer working closely with the Care Leavers Covenant to ensure that recruitment processes offer additional support to Care Leavers
* Care Leavers who apply to our Graduate entry programme each receive individual support with their application. They will also be guaranteed an interview if they have met the minimum requirements

Use this [link](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-8VA8mUI4k) to find out more about our partnership with the Care Leavers Covenant.

**Signing up to Ban the Box and our work with prison leaver organisations**

We are very proud to be a signatory of Ban the Box meaning that we give ex-offenders a fair chance to compete for jobs by removing the criminal convictions tick box from application forms. Instead, we ask about previous convictions later in the recruitment process once the candidate has passed initial screening.

We have also partnered with various organisations to help prison leavers or those identified at risk of offending to assess meaningful careers at Thames Water. One of our strategic partners is Key4life, who run a 12-month programme underpinned by three pillars of emotional resilience, employability, and on-going support. This programme has achieved some amazing results in previous cohorts, with a re-offending rate of 13% (national average is 38%). The end of the programme is a 3-day unpaid work trial in a partner organisation. Currently we have facilitated 5 work tasters at Thames Water which has resulted in 5 young men being offered either a Kickstart placement or a permanent role within our organisation.

We have also recently partnered with Aspire, who are a small Oxford based charity to work with their ‘through the gate’ population to help the transition out of prison. We have helped to place one candidate from this group so far into a Kickstart placement, where he is thriving. As well as Aspire and Key4Life, we are working with Working Chance, the UK’s only women’s prison leaver charity to ensure that women who leave prison can enter back into the world of work in a safe and inclusive environment.

**The 5% club**

We were awarded silver accreditation in October 2021 by the 5% club. The 5% Club is a dynamic movement of employers committed to earn and learn as part of building and developing the workforce they need and a socially mobile, prosperous, and cohesive nation. The Club exists to help its members and all employers increase further the number, quality, and range of earn and learn opportunities across the UK. We have clear plans to ensure by 2025 a minimum of 5% of our workforce will be in earn and learn opportunities. In the last year we have increased our apprenticeship offer from 3 to 23 standards and have delivered over 100 apprenticeships starts compared to our previous annual average of 20 apprentice starts.

**Other partnerships we have built in 2021 include**

* + Social Mobility Foundation
	+ Business in the Community
	+ The Youth Group
	+ GLA design labs project supporting young black men in London
	+ ELBA
	+ Pathway CTM
	+ A range of welfare to work providers
	+ Institute of Technologies
	+ Further and Higher Education

**Programmes to support young people in particular**

***Kickstart***

In line with our strategic direction and workforce profiling data findings, we signed up to the government’s Kickstart scheme. Thames Water has boosted its commitment to unemployed young people aiming to kickstart their careers during the pandemic. We initially offered 50 placements under the government’s £2 billion Kickstart scheme – but this has risen to 100. The scheme funds six-month placements for unemployed 16 to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit.

As well as gaining valuable experience of the workplace, our Kickstarters also benefit from internal training, coaching and mentoring. Among them is Bethany, who said: “*I was going for lots of different jobs and not hearing back for weeks – and one even kept me waiting for three months. Some didn’t even come back to me at all. This was really getting me down, even though I understood it was because of the pandemic. It’s hard to know what you are doing wrong without any feedback. Then I found the Kickstart role with Thames Water and was given some helpful advice and guidance with interview questions and what to expect. This helped my confidence and enabled me to secure the role. It’s a great opportunity because alongside a dedicated mentor there is always support and development throughout the placement.*”

Each of the placements offered, are of the highest quality and cover a variety of roles across the company from our HR and corporate teams to our operational and site-based roles. Each of the placements was individually tailored to the candidate to ensure both the young person and the hosting team maximise the benefits of the placement. Throughout the 6-months placement, the candidates all receive robust wrap around support. Our dedicated Kickstart team facilitate employability and soft skills training as well as regular check-ins with the hiring mentors and the Kickstart candidates. Additionally, all Kickstart colleagues are enrolled onto an accredited Level 1 Employability Skills course delivered by West London College as well as a Diploma in Sustainable Development Goals delivered by Academy One.

To date we have successfully filled all 100 roles offered under the scheme. 76% of our Kickstart completers so far have secured a permanent role within Thames Water with over 81% securing employment in total. (i.e., outside of Thames Water).

Use the links below to hear from our Kickstart colleagues and their hiring mentors directly:

1          Manaslu, Elisha and Nick [https://youtu.be/QBp0I2nLgo4](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FQBp0I2nLgo4&data=04%7C01%7CGosia.Dworska%40thameswater.co.uk%7Cbdc4e57dc1f54926a31a08d9590c664f%7C557abecd32144fbb8e51414b68ebb796%7C0%7C0%7C637638732106685821%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=OJbPGq0x8RQl%2BY8Qn8U6ric8rzcNGEtVv7HsYcCUCQI%3D&reserved=0)

2          Naman and Rosie [https://youtu.be/OV90fTguV6c](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FOV90fTguV6c&data=04%7C01%7CGosia.Dworska%40thameswater.co.uk%7Cbdc4e57dc1f54926a31a08d9590c664f%7C557abecd32144fbb8e51414b68ebb796%7C0%7C0%7C637638732106695819%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=84cTG0beCbVuWzZmdUkRUpIO%2B4ok5aWrgejWU1Xep38%3D&reserved=0)

3          Daniel and Duncan [https://youtu.be/UX6WftCCVmE](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FUX6WftCCVmE&data=04%7C01%7CGosia.Dworska%40thameswater.co.uk%7Cbdc4e57dc1f54926a31a08d9590c664f%7C557abecd32144fbb8e51414b68ebb796%7C0%7C0%7C637638732106695819%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=KlYB5lSAkqbDBQEZt3a6tHNI2Cq2fZoUPT%2FSlHBr1sU%3D&reserved=0)

***Summer Internships***

In summer 2021, with unemployment levels increasing and young people being particularly affected, we launched our Summer Internship Programme offering ‘skills development placements’ to help support students with meaningful experiences of the workplace. ​​​​​​​

​​​​​​​The first principle of our skills strategy is to improve the diversity of our workforce by building a pipeline of skills from our communities and education sector. Our internship programme is one step towards achieving this and is helping to shape the future.

We had 15 young people join us in the summer of 2021, working in roles across our business including Digital, Media Relations, Corporate Affairs and Engineering. The placements were for eight weeks with a celebration ceremony to mark the end of the scheme.

We have worked closely with several referral partners including the Care Leavers Covenant, the Unite Foundation and the Social Mobility Foundation to enable disadvantaged students access the scheme. As a result, 58% of our 2021 Intern cohort were care leavers.​​​​​​​

All our Interns had a mentor to help guide and assist them during their placements. ​​​​​​​Our mentors were supported throughout the process and were able to develop their own skills around mentoring and coaching through this opportunity.

All our Interns successfully completed their full placement, one of them graduated that summer, and secured a permanent role with us post their internship placement.

This is how one of our 2021 Interns reflected on their experience:

*​​​​​​​“My name is Cherie and I studied Business Computing at Brunel University London. In terms of what I would like to do as a career I was not too sure, but since working at Thames I have been considering a career working with 365 Power Platforms. This intern scheme was sent to me by Helen from Unite Foundation Scholarship (a referral partner working with Thames Water’s Skills and Employment team). What interested me about this role was that it was a job title that I have never heard of before (365 Power Platform Trainee), which was intriguing to me. This intern scheme has been very useful so far, as I am a graduate and was not sure of the role that I wanted to get into, this scheme has helped me to gain experience in a role that I would have never imagined working in but enjoy. I am currently working on an app for the social media team, and I will also be working on a mental health first aider app very soon.*

*The experience has been amazing so far, it has been a pleasure to have Leigh (Skills and Employment Advisor) and Andy (Collaboration Lead) as mentors, they have made me feel like an employee and not just an intern.”*

In the summer of 2022, we will be offering Summer Internships again, increasing the number of opportunities, continuing to work with our previous referral partners, as well as via the 10000 Black Interns programme.

***Apprenticeships***

Our Apprenticeship programme at Thames Water has been running successfully for many years, generally recruiting apprentices to Engineering and Science pathways with circa 20 starts per year. For the period 2021/22 our intake will be circa 126 apprentice starters offering more diverse apprenticeship opportunities including degree level opportunities. These are expanding from 2-3 pathways to over 20 pathways for 2022. New opportunities include Civil Engineering, Project Management, LGV Driver, Customer Service, Quantity Surveying, Engineering Technician to name just a few.

Our current apprentice opportunities went live in February 2022 and successful candidates will join the business in September 2022. We want to attract candidates from all social and economic backgrounds and will be applying diverse recruitment panels to our interview process and applying positive action to all roles.

We are also offering internal employees the opportunity to complete an apprenticeship to develop them in their current roles to reach higher and be better. Employees are completing various programmes from Learning Mentor, IT solutions to Senior Leaders MBA programmes.

Use this [link](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X04Xf9kjKbI) to hear from our apprentices directly.

***Graduates scheme***

2021 saw the Thames Water graduate scheme double in size from 4 core pathways to 8. We have a total of 67 on-programme graduates currently in the business across the following eight pathways:

* Operations (Learning to Lead)
* Engineering
* Finance (CIMA, ACA & ACCA accredited)
* Science
* Commercial Procurement- New for 2021
* Digital- New for 2021
* System Asset Planning- New for 2021
* Hydraulic Modelling- New for 2021

We are proud to have a ratio of 49% women within our entire programme with a focus to maintain and improve this ratio to 50%.

2022 will see recruitment of an additional 37 graduate roles into the business, with a focus on removing barriers to becoming part of the Thames Water family. We now have no minimum degree classification requirement and welcome applications from all graduates with a passion for their chosen sphere.

After 24-36 months we are pleased to see our graduates off-board into roles such as Operations Manager, Engineer, Business Accountant, Auditor, Scientist, Lab Specialist, Web Developer, Business Architect, and many other critical roles.

**Covid 19 challenges and solutions**

The implementation of the ambitious skills strategy has been made more complex through the challenges posed by the Covid 19 pandemic. Being a provider of life’s essential service, we have continued to be operational throughout the pandemic with differing levels of impact to our ways of working, depending on the types of roles and the changing government guidelines.

Within our corporate functions we moved fully to distance working and are now implementing hybrid working. This can result in limitations to those who are already disadvantaged in the workplace such as those who struggle due to limited digital skills or lack of access to reliable Wi-Fi and adequate working space at home.

We have put measures in place to identify challenges and offer solutions to remove these additional barriers. A good example is our work experience programme which was run on site pre-pandemic. In 2021 this was undertaken via a virtual route. Working with a couple of referral and delivery partners, we were able to offer a work experience programme to eight Care Leavers from East London. Each of the candidates spent three weeks with a local college working on employability topics and then spent the subsequent three weeks with us where they were given daily interactive talks and tasks via Microsoft Teams from various departments around the business. Each candidate was also offered a one-to-one mentorship with a Thames Water employee and the opportunity to apply for any positions they found interesting.

The impact of the pandemic will be felt for years to come, including the impact on young people’s mental health needs. This is something we are keen in assisting with. With the introduction of our back to work programmes we can give young people hope for the future. The pandemic challenged us to undertake worthwhile and safe experiences for our candidates and staff. We worked with those who had digital barriers such as limited WIFI and access to a computer and have overcome these challenges by providing equipment, access, and digital training.

**Summary of outcomes**

The ambitious plans set out in our Skills and Emerging Talent strategy have been underpinned by a set of practical deliverables. The below figures demonstrate some examples of outcomes for the first year of the implementation period. They highlight our commitment to delivering high quality innovative interventions which result in sustainable solutions and offer real development and career opportunities for young people.

*Kickstart*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Target  | Actual | Transition into employment  |
| 100 (doubled from 50) | 100 placement offers made  | 76% of Kickstart completers securing a permanent role within Thames Water |
| Social mobility data |
| 48% of Kickstarter are from an ethnic minority background  | Compared to the 15% of our current workforce |
| 22% have an impairment, health condition or learning difference  | Compared to the 1% of our current workforce |
| 26% received free school meals  |  |
| 22% didn’t achieve GCSEs A-C grades  |  |
| 11% were first in family to have achieved GCSEs  |  |
| 22% were first in family to have achieved A levels  |  |
| 39% went to a Russell Group University  |  |
| 38% were first in their family to attend University  |  |
| 33% of the Kickstarter employment was affected by COVID  |  |

*Employability into employment*

Community based employability programmes and interventions leading into employment at Thames Water – against our target of 50 offers, we have so far been able to offer over 40 opportunities and are on track to deliver on our commitment by the end of the financial year. These figures include offers for candidates from our priority groups incl. young people, care leavers, prison leavers, young black men.

*Summer interns*

Internship programme we offered 15 placements (having committed to 10 for the first year of the programme). All summer interns successfully completed the placement. One that completed their degree that year secured a permanent role at Thames Water and the others are in our talent pool for future opportunities.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Target  | Actual |
| 10 | 15 |
| Social mobility data |
| 58% care leavers  | 1x mental health difficulty |
| 1 x social/communication impairment  | 2 x refugees  |
| 1 x asylum seeker  | 7 x state schools and 2 x outside of the UK  |
| 33% first in family to gain GCSEs  | 42% first in family to gain A levels |
| 67% first in family to go to university (4x Russell Group University) | 50% received school meals  |

**Innovation, leadership and culture**

We consider our approach to delivering our strategy to be innovative and leading because of the following factors:

* Created a dedicated team to enable meaningful interventions
* Created a mentoring programme within the business allowing our existing colleagues to become ambassadors of the skills and emerging talent agenda whilst developing their own leadership skills
* Created opportunities that are tailored and meaningful with an outlook on sustainability in role and in the business
* Created an internal culture shift, removing barriers to entry and supporting the business to unlock opportunities
* Celebrate success and offer opportunities for all parts of the business to get involved

The successful implementation of the skills strategy has been enabled by the full support from the executive team. The changes required to truly drive social mobility and increase the diversity of our workforce can only be achieved by fundamentally changing the ways in which we attract and retain talent. The initiatives we have implemented since the launch of the strategy are not seen as ‘nice to have’ projects, but instead are fundamental to supporting the skills gap and addressing the challenges identified by our strategic workforce profiling data.

A fundamental change to how we recruit, develop and retain talent is a long- term process and requires behavioural change within the business. We are committed to taking our existing colleagues and leaders on a journey and create real ambassadors. Every project and initiative we run is therefore developed in such a way, that it creates development opportunities for those who get involved to grow their leadership, coaching and mentoring skills and as a result help to shift and shape the Thames Water culture to be truly diverse and inclusive.

**Quotes:**

*Ban the Box*

Thames Water has signed the pledge as part of its ambitious recruitment programme, which plans to upskill people who are out of work and help increase social mobility in London and the Thames Valley. Lynne Graham, HR Director at Thames Water, said: “*We know having a diverse, inclusive, and engaged workforce benefits our customers and communities. By signing up to Ban the Box we hope to give people with past convictions the confidence to apply for roles within our business. We want to ensure all people have an equal opportunity to find a career within the water industry and we don’t want to miss out on accessing untapped, diverse talent. Supporting Ban the Box will go towards helping us achieve this and we will ensure these future employees receive the right training and skills development so they can have successful and sustainable careers.”*

*Kickstart*

Karima Khandker, Thames Water’s Head of Resourcing, Skills and Emerging Talent, said: “*One of our principles is building a pipeline of skills from our communities and education sector. It’s important because we want to make a positive impact on society and play our part in educating and inspiring future generations. We’re committed to securing quality outcomes for as many Kickstarters as possible, for example through apprenticeships or employment.”* Mentors assigned to each Kickstart placement also benefit from ongoing support and can sign up to a professional development Level 3 mentoring qualification.

*Summer interns*

Andy, Cherie’s mentor said, “*I volunteered to be a mentor for the Intern programme as it looked to be an interesting thing to be involved in. It's good to be able to pass skills on to younger people and will help them in their future careers. I lined up several courses and practical labs ready for Cherie to complete along with a final project. We have regular meetings, and Cherie can contact me at any time for assistance or guidance. I've really enjoyed being a Mentor so far. It's great to see Cherie really getting involved and asking lots of questions. Cherie is gaining valuable real-world skills which she will be able to use and utilise in the future. “*