Movement To Work Awards Submission 2022

Category: **Mentor of the Year**– an individual who has gone above and beyond in making a difference to the experience that young people have had on Movement to Work placements 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 (eg. statistics, case studies, photos) to info@movementtowork.com

**Our nominee**

We would like to nominate Nicholas Burnett for the Mentor of the Year award. Nicholas joined Team Thames in 2016 developing site document libraries. Over time he moved to building a digital asset management and operations library and document system and is now delivering projects including critical site documentation. Nicholas always loved working with young people and felt we all had a duty to support them during the pandemic response considering young people’s development and employment chances have been so badly affected during this time.

Nicholas is currently a mentor as part of our Kickstart scheme, supporting young people to develop and grow in confidence and abilities.

In early 2021, when Thames Water announced its involvement in the government’s Kickstart scheme, Nicholas was one of the first colleagues to proactively approach the Employment & Skills team wanting to get involved and support young people who have been disproportionately affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. Nicholas created an interesting developmental Kickstart role within his team and was soon presented with two Kickstart candidates ready to interview. Having interviewed the two candidates, Nicholas saw great potential in both and offered to take both candidates on. He demonstrated great passion to develop young people and was a very dedicated mentor throughout the programme. Not only was he committed to supporting his Kickstart mentees whilst on placement, but he was also very supportive in helping both young people successfully secure a permanent role at Thames Water post Kickstart. Nicholas played an active role in helping his two Kickstart candidates secure permanent roles at Thames Water through his tailored and supportive mentoring interventions. Both young people are now permanent employees of Thames Water and thriving in their new roles having grown in confidence and abilities whilst working with Nicholas.

Manaslu shares her experience of being mentored by Nicholas:

*Nick was a mentor who really taught us how to walk in Thames Water. He was my motivator and my advisor and someone I can confide in and trust. I want to reiterate that my success came because I had such a good mentor that let me grow comfortably and at my own pace.*

Once both of his Kickstart mentees completed their placements, Nicholas offered to continue mentoring and went on to offer three more placements. One of those is for a candidate with multiple complex barriers into employment including autism and ADHD. Whilst many mentors would shy away from supporting someone with complex needs, Nicholas was keen to offer the opportunity and see beyond the barriers, focusing on how best to support the candidate.

This is how one of Nicholas’ team colleagues described his mentoring skills:

*Nick is a valued colleague and skilful mentor for young people – Nick is creative, patient and has great listening skills. As a mentor he does a fantastic job guiding and supporting young people so that they realise their true potential and have the skills to go on and have successful careers.*

Nicholas is a true ambassador of mentoring young people and has been supportive of our wider employment and skills initiatives as well as inspiring other mentors to get involved.

Use the link below to hear from Nicholas and his Kickstart mentees directly:

[Kickstart scheme - Manaslu and Elisha - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBp0I2nLgo4)

**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.

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 see the full Skills Strategy attached in the supporting documentation*

**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.

***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.

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).

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.*

**Mentoring for Kickstart**

Our Kickstart offer to the business was positioned as a mutual learning opportunity and all colleagues who volunteered to host a young person via the scheme, were enrolled onto our Kickstart hiring mentor programme. The scheme attracted many hiring mentors from different parts of the business, some of whom had great leadership experience and wanted to give back, whilst others wanted to gain valuable mentoring experience to develop themselves. Detailed guidance and information was made available to all Thames Water employees from very early on to ensure those interested can make an informed decision before joining the scheme.

Additional support for hiring mentors includes:

* All hiring mentors receive training to host placements
* Some candidates have been care experienced or from vulnerable groups – we provided awareness training to ensure hiring mentors are supported
* Learning mentor level 3 apprenticeships available to all mentors
* Learning opportunities via our internal learning platform

Example guidance for hiring mentors - how to host a successful placement:

**Support the young person in reflecting on the skills they've acquired and how these can be expressed to potential employers. Many young people struggle to relate their skills to what's required in the workplace.**

**Have the right skills to support a young person in the early stages of their career. They may need more guidance than other colleagues. Things like workday structure and working hours and patterns may need to be more flexible.**

**Make sure you have the time to properly support someone through the placement**

**For some of these young people they are new to the world of work or sector, so the way they are managed is crucial.**

**Good mentoring will help them develop more quickly, building up their confidence and demonstrating that they can perform a positive role in the world of work.**

**Remember you'll receive additional support, with regular check-ins to monitor progress.**

The following behaviours were identified as key to getting the best out of a placement:

* Providing feedback, praise, and recognition
* Balancing guidance with appropriate levels of autonomy and empowerment
* Taking an interest in the individual
* Being available to talk if a placement has a question or a problem
* Having a personable and approachable manner

*Please see the full hiring mentor guidance document attached in the supporting documentation*