

# CASE STUDY

## THAMES WATER IS MAKING WORK WORK WITH BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

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



### About Thames Water

The UK's biggest water and wastewater services provider. Thames Water's hardworking and dedicated colleagues provide essential services around the clock to 15 million customers across London, the Thames Valley, and surrounding areas.

### The issue

One of the biggest people challenges Thames Water faces 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. Additionally, as demonstrated in the findings of its own Workforce Profiling Report, it highlighted that as a business Thames Water was not fully reflective of the diversity of the communities it serves. It also had an increasingly ageing workforce with a smaller younger demographic.

The company is aware that it has talented people at hand, yet creating the opportunity to ensure people have access to sustained career prospects is often the building block that is missed. Thames Water has several initiatives to create a workforce reflective of the communities it serves, whilst ensuring it promotes responsible employment practices.



**“OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY HAS SUPPORTED US IN DELIVERING THESE COMMITMENTS AND OFFERS ADVICE AND CHALLENGE SO WE CAN CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVE, CHANGE, AND DEVELOP. THE PARTNERSHIP NOT ONLY HELPS US TO DELIVER ON OUR PROMISES, BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY SUPPORTS US IN CREATING CAREERS NOT JUST JOBS AND A SOCIOECONOMICALLY DIVERSE WORKFORCE.”**

**Karima Khandker** Head of Resourcing, Skills, and Emerging Talent





## Thames Water's Skills Strategy

Thames Water had an opportunity to engage its workforce to ensure it is diverse and reflective of the local communities it serves. In early 2021, it launched its [Skills Strategy](#) designed to support it in meeting its purpose: to deliver life's essential service, so its customers, communities and the environment could thrive. Several great initiatives already existed within the business; however, many projects had been run independent of each other, with a limited joined-up approach or strategy alignment. The Skills Strategy sets the company up for success both now and in the future. It enables Thames Water to be forward-thinking, considering both the short and long-term skills requirements for the business 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 make work work for all. Thames Water's desire is to contribute to the creation of a fair society and tackle real challenges.

## The journey

To enable the successful implementation of the Skills Strategy, a new Skills and Emerging Talent team was formed. It has grown over the last 18 months and is a well-established team within the Thames Water People function that delivers excellent outcomes focused on careers not just jobs and drives meaningful sustainable change. The team owns and leads 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.

Through the development of the Skills and Emerging Talent team, it has 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 charities and specialist referral partners. It has chosen to work with the selected partnerships due to the expertise they offer and alignment with its focus groups. Also, signing up to the Care Leaver Covenant, Ban The Box and The 5% Club has enabled the company to enhance entry routes for underrepresented groups.



The Prince's Responsible Business Network

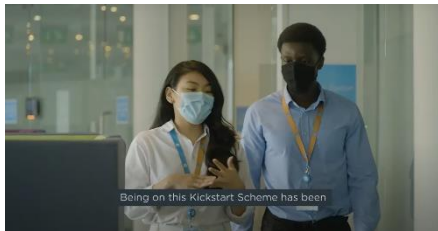
## HOW BITC HELPED THAMES WATER

Thames Water has signed up to Business in the Community's (BITC) [Ban the Box campaign](#) and is playing its part in creating fair opportunities for people with criminal convictions to compete for jobs by removing the initial criminal convictions tick box from application forms, and asking about this later in the recruitment process. Thames Water has publicly committed to fairly assessing criminal convictions; judging candidates first and foremost on the basis of their skills and suitability for a role, rather than their past mistakes.

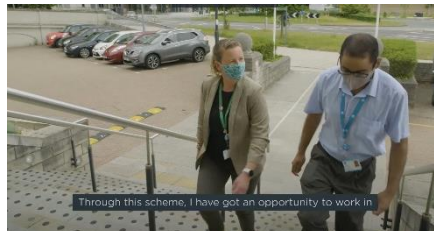
## Programme updates

- **Kickstart** – young people post-COVID employment scheme. Thames Water initially offered 50 placements under the government's Kickstart scheme, however, this increased to 100 placements. 52% of its Kickstart candidates secured a permanent role within Thames Water, with 67% securing employment in total.

Hear from Thames Water's Kickstart colleagues and their hiring mentors directly.



[Manaslu, Elisha and Nick](#)



[Naman and Rosie](#)



[Daniel and Duncan](#)

- **Summer Internships** – Over the last two years, Thames Water has had 35 young people join the team on an eight-week paid summer internship placement, working in roles across the business including Digital, Media Relations, Corporate Affairs and Engineering. The business worked closely with several specialist referral partners including the Care Leavers Covenant, the Unite Foundation, the Social Mobility Foundation and 10,000 Black Interns to enable disadvantaged students to access the scheme.
- **Apprenticeships** – The Apprenticeship programme at Thames Water has been running successfully for many years, recruiting apprentices to Engineering and Science pathways. Since the launch of the Skills Strategy, it is now offering more diverse apprenticeship pathways (previously 3, now 31) and it now offers up to degree-level opportunities. Thames Water wants to attract candidates from all social and economic backgrounds and has introduced diverse

recruitment panels to our interview process as well as applying positive action to all roles.

It is also offering internal employees the opportunity to complete an apprenticeship to develop them in their current roles and support them to build their careers.



[Hear from Thames Water's apprentices](#)

- **SWAPs** – To support recruitment into its customer service functions, Thames Water has worked closely with the DWP to enable customer service SWAPs (sector-based work

academy programmes) in the Swindon and Reading regions. Upon completion of their customer service course and employability programme with a local FE college, participants spend some time hearing directly from Thames Water and are then guaranteed a first-stage interview with the company's Resourcing teams. The SWAP programme has been highly successful and in the first year has enabled 20 colleagues to join the business who might not otherwise have considered a career with Thames Water or felt equipped to apply.

## Summary

The successful implementation of the Skills Strategy has been enabled by the full support from the Thames Water Executive and through working in partnership with organisations such as Business in the Community.

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 it attracts and retains talent. The initiatives it has implemented since the launch of the strategy are not 'nice to have' projects, but are fundamental to supporting the skills gap and addressing the challenges identified by its strategic workforce profiling data.

A fundamental change to how it recruits, develops, and retains talent is a long-term process and requires behavioural change within the business.

Thames Water is committed to taking its existing colleagues and leaders on a journey and create real ambassadors. Every project and initiative it runs is 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 helps to shift and shape the company's mindset to be truly diverse and inclusive.

**“WE HOPE THAT BY SHARING OUR STORY WE MIGHT ENCOURAGE OTHER ORGANISATIONS TO TAKE SIMILAR STEPS BY #MAKINGWORKWORK FOR EVERYONE.”**



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