Foreword

At Centrica we supply energy and energy-related services to over 28 million customer accounts in the UK, Ireland and North America, through strong brands such as British Gas, Direct Energy and Bord Gáis Energy supported by 12,000 engineers and technicians. We are proud to play our part in society, supplying customers with the energy and services they need at home and at work. However, to succeed in the 21st century, we recognise that it is not enough for us simply to provide these products and services. We have to evolve how we do business and play our part to deliver positive change in society.

We know that there have been real improvements in the labour market in recent years. Wages have begun to climb, and taxes have come down for those on low incomes. As a diverse international energy and services company, we make an important contribution to the labour market. We directly employ over 38,000 people worldwide, recruiting and developing talent to support our customer services, engineering and generation businesses. We have taken a leadership position in recruiting apprentices, with 1,200 apprentices currently in training across our 6 academy sites, rated outstanding by Ofsted.

But we also know things haven’t improved for everyone across the labour market. The population of those young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) remains stubbornly high – around 850,000 young people currently fall into this category. Over the next decade it has been estimated that this youth unemployment could cost the UK some £28 billion.1

We recognise we have a role to play in engaging this part of the labour market. Our success as a business is based on identifying and retaining talent. Leveraging our training expertise to support a more inclusive labour market will provide us with access to a greater pool of talent, while tackling a challenging part of that market.

That is why, alongside our partnership with Business in the Community (BITC) to inspire young people in schools about careers in energy and our efforts to increase interest in engineering amongst young women, we have also committed to provide pre-employment training targeted at NEETs. Working with the Movement to Work campaign in 2014, we set out to create a bespoke, high standard training course that responded to the unique needs of young people not in employment education or training, who faced significant challenges to get into the workplace. In total, as part of our scheme, we delivered 438 training places in 2014 – 2015, with 50 per cent of those attendees securing permanent employment upon completion of the course, either in our business or elsewhere. And this year, we set out our commitment to provide a further 600 places over the coming two years. Together with our partners in Movement to Work, since the end of 2013 we have organised placements for over 40,000 young people and over 50% of them have been able to move into a job as a result.

Our success in delivering this programme is not just evidenced in the numbers of people who participated, but in the real difference we were able to provide to individual employment prospects. Some of the interviews with our course attendees set out in this report give a flavour of the real difference we have been able to make on an individual level, demonstrating how we have helped bridge the gap between unemployment and employment.

Of course, we are still learning how best to develop our Movement to Work offering and we have taken away important lessons from our first two years. We also understand we won’t tackle youth unemployment alone, but my hope is that this report will make the compelling case for others to participate and play their role in making a difference.

Iain Conn
Chief Executive, Centrica

We applaud Centrica’s ongoing commitment

Although, in recent months, youth unemployment figures have begun to fall, there are still many young people who face significant barriers to employment.

These young people are often hard to reach, so we applaud Centrica’s ongoing commitment to provide a quality, high standard pre-employment training course that’s responsive to their needs. Pre-employment activities such as these are vital to improving young people’s future job prospects, particularly for those who have been out of work for a long time. It’s clear, from the testimonials in this paper, how transformational this opportunity can be.

For many who are stuck in a vicious experience trap, a programme like this is key to unlocking their future employment potential. It is clear that in the current skills context, businesses have an important role to play in expanding access to the labour market for young people, as there are huge benefits to broadening their future talent pool.

Our Future Proof campaign calls on businesses to rethink their recruitment practices and open up access to quality jobs for all young people. From their apprenticeships to their Movement to Work programme, Centrica are showing real leadership by looking at how they can provide more tailored routes into their business for young people. By producing this paper, two years after their programme started, Centrica is taking the important step to evaluate their programme, measure its impact and improve the longer term outcomes.

Though there is still clearly work to be done on improving retention rates, this white paper and the lessons learned from the first year will become an invaluable resource for any business looking to run a similar scheme. Their ambition to share the insights gained from this project, will be vital for mobilising more businesses to take action on this agenda.

Grace Mehanna,
Campaign Director, Talent & Skills, Business in the Community

1. Acevo Commission on Youth Unemployment
Movement to work

Context

In October-December 2015, approximately 850,000 of all young people aged 16-24 were not in employment, education or training (NEET).²

The current government has focused heavily on delivering apprenticeships as a means of providing job opportunities for young workers. It has pledged to deliver 3 million new apprenticeships in this Parliament – a 35% increase over the 2.2 million apprenticeships delivered in the last Parliament.

In the summer Budget of 2015, the Chancellor announced the introduction of a new levy on all large UK employers to fund apprenticeships. The levy, which will come into force in April 2017, underpins the government’s apprenticeship reform programme and is intended to provide the funding and incentive to business to help deliver this commitment.

As a longstanding employer of apprentices, Centrica is fully supportive of the Government’s apprenticeship agenda. We currently have approximately 1,200 apprentices in training across our six academy sites.

Apprenticeships, however, are not the answer for all people seeking a first step into employment. In fact, they’re often not for first time workers at all. Across our business, approximately 30 per cent of our apprentices are over 30. And we hire significant numbers of apprentices that are over 50.

We believe that for some unemployed young people, particularly those that may have been out of work for some time, there is a need for pre-employment training that is crucial to developing confidence and foundation level skills.

This is where pre-employment training, as inspired by Movement to Work, can offer a viable solution, both for businesses looking to find talent and for young people looking to find employment and better their future prospects.

² http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingSummary/SN06765
Movement to Work

Centrica became a founding partner of the Movement to Work programme in 2013, leading the way alongside other UK based businesses including Marks and Spencer, BT and Accenture. Movement to Work has been set up as a charity to enable UK employers to collaborate and work together to tackle youth unemployment, and member employers offer 4-6 weeks of work experience and employability training to 16-24 year old NEETs.

In the first two years, our British Gas business unit welcomed 438 young people onto a newly developed training programme, designed to meet the key Movement to Work objectives:
- Creating vocational training and work experience placements for unemployed young people, particularly those who have been out of work, education or training for some time.
- Linking training placements to real jobs, including apprenticeships, to meet Movement to Work’s aim of getting 50 per cent of the young people completing placements into jobs or further study or training.

The Centrica Movement to Work course was delivered across six of our business locations: Leeds, Leicester, Manchester, Cardiff, Oldbury and Edinburgh. Each course lasted 4-5 weeks and focussed on developing both individual confidence and the specific skills required for one of our customer services apprenticeship schemes.

We partnered with training providers, A4E (now People Plus), ACT and Rathbone to deliver our course content. Our training providers understood the unique learning requirements of our course attendees and were able to work with our in house teams to tailor our courses accordingly. Our learnings from our training providers’ ability to deploy the best teaching methods was a key to the success of our programme.

In return our internal Resourcing and Learning and Development teams were able to contribute a crucial understanding of what specific skills our business required and develop an awareness of what it means to work in a commercial environment. It was a true collaboration, and the content of our course evolved over the two years it was run.

Were we successful?

In our first two years, of the 438 original course attendees, 211 were employed upon completion of the course. Of these, 162 took roles within Centrica, 42 were employed externally and 7 went onto further training. This total accounted for nearly 50 per cent of the course intake – in line with the aspiration of Movement to Work.

We recognise that the real test of our success lies not just in the initial proportion of people we can successfully find roles and training for, but through our ability to ensure they have the confidence and skills to stay there and flourish.

The individual case studies included in this report provide a sense of the impact we were able to have. Common themes which our participants fed back to us include:
- The value of understanding what it takes to work in a customer focused, commercial environment.
- Appreciation for the development of foundation skills which provide a “gateway” into other roles and training opportunities.
- Being able to share development needs and to have the opportunity to address them.

When we returned a few months after completion of the courses in years 1 and 2, we recorded that the attrition rates of those entering roles via Movement to Work were higher in some places than attrition rates of other colleagues, recruited as part of business as usual practices.

This drop-out rate can be partially explained by individual circumstances. And we know that employing young people that have been NEET for a long period of time will always be challenging.

That said, we have identified one area in the course that we felt could be improved as a consequence, potentially serving to reduce our drop-out rates in the future. As a result, this year, we are adapting our programme to include more hands on work experience. We are confident that this will improve the likelihood of people sticking with their jobs once they have completed the course.

As part of our commitment to Movement to Work, we pledged not only to run pre-employment training ourselves, but also to encourage our suppliers to engage. Over the two years, we hosted a number of supplier events where we shared Centrica’s journey since joining Movement to Work.

We are proud that as a consequence of this activity, three suppliers are now introducing their own employability programmes, including Fujitsu.

Next steps

This year we are enhancing the pre-employment training period of our programme, extending its length to allow attendees more time on work experience placements, providing extra opportunity to build both confidence and skills. We also have a desire to reach yet more parts of the country and as such we are looking at extra locations in which we could feasibly offer the course.

We continue to aim for the Movement to Work aspiration of getting 50% into work, education or training upon completion of the course.

To achieve this, we are continuing to work closely with our training partner providers to understand what opportunities are available outside of Centrica to better direct course participants to apply for jobs elsewhere if they are unable to find a suitable opening here.

We are also liaising closely with other Movement to Work employers to create a talent pool of people that have completed Movement to Work courses. This should allow organisations to better identify individuals that have completed training, and recruit accordingly. To maximise impact, and help build a virtuous circle of employment opportunities, we hope all 300 employers involved with Movement to Work will take part in this.

Finally, we will continue to link our courses directly to our apprenticeships, providing great further on-the-job learning opportunities for our young people as they roll off the Movement to Work programme.

Movement to Work at Centrica

| 438 people | 211 people | 162 people | 42 people | 7 people | 48% | 72 | 33 | 3 |
| Number of young people trained in 2014 – 2015 | Total number of young people employed or training | Number of young people employed internally | Number of young people employed externally | Number of young people moved into further training | Overall employment conversion rate | Number of suppliers engaged | Number of suppliers expressed interest | Number of suppliers signed up |
What our apprentices think

Aimee Hearn – Customer Service Apprentice

Aimee Hearn, 21, from Pontprennau in Cardiff, started training as an apprentice Customer Service Advisor with British Gas in May 2014.

As part of the pilot apprenticeship scheme, Aimee initially completed an eight-week pre-employment training programme, through Movement to Work. The programme was delivered by British Gas in partnership with local training provider, ACT Training, the Prince’s Trust and Global Action Plan.

Before securing a place on the course, Aimee was unemployed for six months. She went to university to study dental technology for a year as well, but it wasn’t the right career path for her. She found a job at a local hairdresser’s but that soon came to an end due to lack of work.

She said: “For months, I would visit my local job centre and after attending a taster day, I instantly knew the programme really worked for me. I hope the apprenticeship will lead me to a stable job, hopefully a long-term career with British Gas.”

“All you need is for someone to give you a chance…”

Huzafa Abowath – Customer Service Apprentice

Huzafa Abowath, 25, from Leicester, applied for the Movement to Work programme with British Gas at its services contact centre in Leicester.

Like many young people, Huzafa struggled to get a job that would lead to a long-term career. He said: “I applied for jobs daily but I rarely got a response back. I had a mixed career history after leaving school, so I knew that my lack of relevant experience was definitely an issue, but I also felt like people were making unfair assumptions about how committed I was to actually find a job.

“Getting the place on the programme gave me an instant boost. I finally felt like I was being given a chance by somebody. I became more confident and that really had an impact on my job, especially talking with customers.”

Huzafa’s new-found confidence led him to securing a role as one of British Gas’ first ten customer service apprentices at the contact centre.

“It was the first training programme I applied for and I’m so pleased that I did; so much so that I’ve been recommending it to friends.

Tony Clamp – Customer Service Adviser

Tony Clamp, 21, from Leeds, successfully completed the Movement to Work scheme with British Gas in June 2015.

Tony has since secured a full-time role as a Customer Service Advisor, taking with him a new-found confidence in his abilities.

Despite having a qualification in IT and a broad employment history, Tony struggled to find a full time job. He says: “I had experience in lots of different sectors, but not specifically in one area, which really prevented me from applying for the roles I was interested in.

“I did everything I could to get on the career ladder, from filling out application forms to actually visiting businesses to hand over my CV. Despite many attempts, I would rarely hear back from employers, making it difficult to understand how I could get ahead.

“I then heard about the Movement to Work scheme at my local job centre and after attending a taster day, I instantly knew the programme was for me.”

After just a couple of weeks into the scheme, Tony felt transformed and his self-confidence levels had grown.

“I really enjoyed being part of the scheme. Now that I’m in a full-time role with British Gas, I’d like to eventually train to become an ‘advocate’, which means someone who’s a specialist in IT.

“We’re friends and we play football together and often socialise after work. Huzafa says he’s in a much happier place now: "Completing the Movement to Work programme is the best thing that I’ve done. I’ve made my family proud and I have experience on my CV now as well as the apprenticeship.

“The programme really worked for me. I hope more young people in tough situations like I was will think about applying for opportunities like this.

“All you need is for someone to give you a chance…”

“The course is a good mix of learning with our instructors to actually speaking with customers once we’re fully trained. My instructors taught us about the importance of customer service.

“I’m close to many of the people I was on the programme with because we learnt and grew together. It’s great how close we all are now. We’re friends and we play football together and often socialise after work. Huzafa says he’s in a much happier place now: "Completing the Movement to Work programme is the best thing that I’ve done. I’ve made my family proud and I have experience on my CV now as well as the apprenticeship.

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“Being part of the programme has given me confidence in my own ability and has given me the first step onto what I hope will be a long career with British Gas.”

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Our programme team

John Madden, Head of Volume Resourcing

I was part of the initial group that put together the programme to meet our commitment to Movement to Work. At the time, we recognised that for this to be successful and sustainable, it was going to be crucial for us to develop a course that met our commitment, but did not detract from our business as usual resourcing activity.

How did you find suitable people to attend the course?

We work with welfare to work providers already. We targeted potential attendees via these, and invited those individuals that were recommended to us to taster days. From there we could identify those that might not be suited for the course. In the main, it was only those that did not express an interest in furthering their skills in the customer service area that did not proceed onto the course itself.

What was your biggest learning from setting up the programme?

It was challenging at the beginning, without a project manager. We rectified this 3 months in and never looked back! The project manager was well placed to manage the functional crossover within the business. I’d recommend that any organisation looking to introduce the scheme gets a project manager in place from the beginning.

Why did Centrica want to be involved with this scheme?

Some organisations and companies do this because they cannot fill their roles from the current pool of applicants. This is not the case for us at British Gas and Centrica. It was not a case that we had to deal with an existing recruitment challenge. We got involved because it is the right thing to do, and doing the right thing is core to our business.

Paula Knight, Learning and Development

I was asked to support the project shortly after it started. The business was keen to provide insight to our training provider partners into what skills the attendees would need once they joined the company.

How does Movement to Work compare to other programmes you have been involved with?

It is very different – normally we are dealing with adults who are in work already and have the necessary skills to get through the applications process. These young people were different. Often they were struggling with confidence, self esteem and self regard. Many were capable of working for us, but they just didn’t believe that. I was shocked at how challenging it can be for some young people to move into the world of work. Some personal circumstances were quite humbling. These young people may never have seen someone go out to work in their life. You meet these people and they have such determination to succeed. They just needed someone to give them that opportunity and somebody to open the door.

Lynsey Mellor, Project Manager

I was recruited as a project manager to manage the delivery of the Movement to Work commitment. I arrived just as the pilots were set up. I then ran the pilots and reviewed and then set to coordinating the programme for 2015.

Did the course evolve during the pilot period?

Yes - we needed to make sure that the young people were at the heart of the programme. To do this, we introduced a continuous improvement approach. The training providers were quite happy to adapt the course to make it more suitable for the company and the attendees as we progressed. The tweaks we made meant that it became more focussed on finding the attendees roles once they had finished the course. The training partner was very open to our involvement and changes.

What advice would you give to your counterparts in other companies intending to run a Movement to Work programme?

It’s definitely worth getting senior level buy in from the outset. Talk about the people in real terms rather than in numerical targets – get engagement from colleagues on a personal level. Don’t be afraid to reach out to other employers that are already doing this. Make sure it’s the right thing for your business and that it is sustainable.

Pulling together a successful Movement to Work programme requires a great team

“These young people were different. Often they were struggling with confidence, self esteem and self regard. Many were capable of working for us, but they just didn’t believe that.”
How you can set up a successful pre-employment programme in your business

More than 35,000 young people have already taken part in Movement to Work programmes through the 200 employers already involved. It is clear that Movement to Work is already proving to be a strong source of talent for the country’s leading employers and a strong pathway into apprenticeships, supporting the Government’s ambitious target to see 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020.

Against this backdrop, we want to encourage more businesses to take part. Here are some of our top tips for setting up a pre-employment training scheme in your organisation:

- Ensure that your business leaders are engaged with the programme and that you have senior level sponsorship and advocacy.
- Provide a dedicated project manager.
- Use your existing relationships with welfare to work providers and delivery partners to identify the most suitable applicants for the course.
- Be guided by your training providers on the content and delivery of the course – they have the experience and they know how to get the best out of the attendees.
- Make sure it’s the right programme for your business and that it is sustainable.

For more, please visit:
www.movementtowork.co.uk