



# nationalgrid

National Grid's 'Grid for Good' programme was started in 2020 with the aim of helping socio-economically disadvantaged young people into employment. Over the past few years, the programme has expanded and now offers structured support to young people from 3 to older groups returning to work.

Working with its supply-chain partners, [National Grid](#) is working to have a positive impact on the lives of young people by creating training and employment opportunities. Mentoring forms one of the elements of this support.

Youth Futures Foundation were pleased to have the chance to speak with the [UK Social Impact Senior Manager, Fergus Hynd](#), to find out more about the programme. In our conversation with him, he shared some insights about which of Grid for Good's interventions are having a positive impact and why.



## **T**Fergus, can you tell us why National Grid decided to set up Grid for Good?

We all live in a community and we are all affected by the relative health and wellbeing of the adjacent communities. So, in our view, we all have a vested interest in making our communities better places to live in.

As a national employer, National Grid can do this by delivering a programme of support for specific groups that live in these communities, such as disadvantaged young people.

From an economic perspective, we also have an ageing workforce. To achieve what we need to for the security of the country, we need to get younger talent into our organisations. We need creative problem-solving and ideas for the problems we have, and for those we don't even know about yet. We need people with a diversity of background – including different experiences and ways of thinking – baked into our workforce. That is how we are going to be able to think through our problems in as many different ways as possible.

## **O**ur evidence shows that building strong networks and working in partnership is fundamental to the success of youth employment programmes. Can you describe what you've learnt and how you've benefited from working in partnership?

We like to have a robust, regionally-informed view before we start any engagement work with our partners, such as Catch 22. While there may be common features between areas, the specific challenges that, say, young people and our teams across the east of England is facing will be quite different to what another area of the country may be facing. Our community outreach into schools and colleges helps us to gain an understanding of each region's particular needs, whether that's gang violence in inner cities or lack of transport infrastructure in more rural settings.

Recently, we began working directly with other employers within our networks and supply chain in an "enterprise model", and this has made a huge difference to the impact we are having. We now understand which employers could support us as we scale our reach in the next phase of Grid for Good. That cross-sector support and stability means we can build lasting, holistic partnerships, something that is crucial for interventions with disadvantaged young people. As a business, we try to find ways to work within the ecosystem of each organisation and its local community, to ensure that the skills offering suits the needs of the local community and its young people.



## **How does Grid for Good approach working with young people in their early years to engage them with the energy sector or 'green jobs'?**

In an area where the jobs may not yet exist - for example in the North East where there is the potential for huge growth in wind farming in the future – we take a long-term view. We consider the infrastructure and the need for outreach and programmes to be sustained, repaired and replaced. That scenario offers us a fundamental opportunity for creating wider social impact through appropriate workforce planning.

It is never too young to seed the inspiration and excitement amongst younger audiences, which is why we create materials and engagements for people as young as three years old. If a young person has had that inspiration about careers early on, and up to about age 15, we find it is so much easier to engage with them at the stage where they are thinking more intently about their future.

If employers don't engage with younger audiences, when they do want to recruit, younger people from about the age of 15 years have often already made their choices for the kind of qualifications they want to pursue and the opportunity is lost for both sides.

So there is a strategic benefit to taking a rounded, long-term view about workforce planning and strategising talent pipelines. It needs to have an element of community outreach, as well as the shorter term recruitment campaigns to keep positions filled.

## **What kinds of things do employers need to consider when they are reaching out to young people about apprenticeships?**

As an employer, you need to be engaged with teachers and parents concurrently, or even before you work with any of the young people in the area. You will find yourself trying to promote pathways such as apprenticeships under the influence of their whole family and different generations, who may have a different view on what is right for their young people.

At National Grid we appreciate that schools must perform to national academic targets. So while they may see the value of an apprenticeship programme, we are sensitive to the reality they may not have capacity or depth of understanding to support it.

One way to effectively engage with that challenge is by starting with understanding that community's perspective really well, and ideally working with third party local partners as part of your approach. We offer taster sessions in colleges, so that students and employers who are interested can have a chance to find out about our programmes.

This is part of the reason it is important to develop a solid understanding of the communities we work with as part of any strategic partnership approach. As long as there is meaningful communication and engagement with local stakeholders, there are always exciting opportunities to be had.

## **What's the one thing that you think can really shift perspectives on the stigmas or assumptions around vocational pathways?**

In my experience, taking a youth-led approach to promoting opportunities through peer ambassadors can lead to high-impact outcomes.

When a young person sees someone just two or three years' older than they are pull up in their own car, they see someone who has become successful and independent. That sparks their sense of motivation, because they see what it is they want to be. And afterwards, they may take that story home to their family. Then the young person is the one who convinces parents or their people about why an apprenticeship will work for them.

This works on a number of levels. Of course, young people understand that the benefits and security of a salaried position are important. But peer ambassadors show them something more. They see a relatable role model in the company and in employment generally, and that is what inspires them.

For employers looking to recruit younger talent, this means that it is important to have a young cohort as part of your workforce. They will be able to offer that peer-to-peer connection. Whenever we have peer ambassadors engaged, the outcomes from our outreach effort have a much higher impact on measures like social mobility and employability.

## **We'd love to hear more about the mentoring offering that comes under the Grid for Good programme, and how it's serving marginalised young people who may face additional barriers when transitioning from education into employment?**

One of our partners, [Catch 22](#), is a 200-year old charity focused on building resilience and aspirations in communities across the UK. Grid for Good and Catch 22 are working in partnership to create pathways for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are facing significant barriers to employment.

They are helping us to work with young people with experience of the care system, the criminal justice system and those who are young carers. We work with some who have had experience of the witness protection programme, or experience of county lines or gang culture – by way of a few examples. The young people we work with may also have other complex challenges such as mental health conditions or special educational needs. Some may never have had access to a consistent traditional education.

One of the things that I am most proud of, since launching the Grid for Good, is creating that potential way through for the young people with these kinds of experiences. Being able to help a young person from one of these cohorts into the workplace, creates a relatable role model for others who follow in their footsteps. That can spark real change in a community.



Find out more about  
National Grid's  
programmes on their  
website

[www.nationalgrid.com  
/responsibility/commu  
nity/grid-for-good](http://www.nationalgrid.com/responsibility/community/grid-for-good)

We spend a lot of time on soft skills and networking. Often we are working with a young person who has no network. So they may work with a mentor on something very practical, such as building a LinkedIn profile or on developing their communication skills.

Recently, I've starting to match Grid for Good alumni who are now in established careers with new Grid for Good placement students, and this is one of the most rewarding aspects of this work. So, we are starting to witness a positive impact of our previous Grid for Good placements now supporting those just starting out.

### **What is your one top tip or piece of advice for employers who are at the beginning of their mentoring, coaching or youth employment journey?**

Find people that feel the same way as you do in your organisation and start with small scale, achievable interventions. Develop your approach based on what worked for that area and that team. Be guided by the evidence of what was successful and be sure to communicate the achievement. Resist the urge to systematise your approach into something that is one size fits all.

Every organisation and community will have different cultures and requirements. So be prepared to adapt what you learn and – again - make a point of shouting about your successes.

For more employer case studies and resources, visit the Youth Futures Foundation website or connect with us on Twitter and LinkedIn



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