

# Growing Level 2 talent and strengthening sector skills through apprenticeships



Thames Water is the UK's largest water and wastewater company, serving 16 million customers every day. Apprenticeships sit at the heart of its long-term workforce strategy, helping the organisation build a resilient talent pipeline, widen access for young people, and influence skills development across its extensive supply chain.

With a strong focus on Level 2 and 3 pathways, Thames Water is creating more entry-level opportunities, improving retention, and supporting young people with diverse needs to succeed.

## Why Thames Water is creating more entry-level apprenticeship opportunities

The water sector faces significant long-term skills shortages, particularly in operational and technical roles that are essential to maintaining and upgrading critical infrastructure. At the same time, many young people struggle to access meaningful early-career opportunities, especially those without prior work experience or strong networks.

To address this, Thames Water is **intentionally expanding the number and variety of entry-level apprenticeships**. The organisation needs a stronger pipeline of new talent, young people need accessible and supported routes into the industry, and supply chain employers often struggle to attract applicants. Entry-level roles are also the most effective way to widen access, particularly for young people who may not yet be ready for higher-level programmes.



*Make it an Apprenticeship*

## Make it a Level 2

Thames Water has made a deliberate shift towards expanding Level 2 apprenticeships. The organisation has seen:

- A clear need for early-career pathways.
- Many young applicants have limited work experience or confidence. Level 2 apprenticeships provide a **structured, supported route into the sector**.
- A strong match with operational workforce needs.
- Thames Water's 5–10-year workforce renewal plans highlight significant demand for roles that naturally align with Level 2 and 3 pathways.
- Evidence that Level 2 apprentices thrive with the right support.
- With strengthened **induction, clear expectations and wrap-around pastoral support**, Thames Water has achieved **retention rates** above 80%, rising to 92% for recent cohorts.
- A commitment to widening access and supporting diverse young people
- Level 2 roles allow Thames Water to reach young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), care leavers, and others who may not yet be ready for higher-level programmes.

As a result, **over 50% of externally advertised apprenticeships are now Level 2 or 3**.

## Make more opportunities

Thames Water is not only increasing the number of apprenticeships within its own organisation, it is actively creating more opportunities across the entire water sector. This reflects a **strategic commitment to building a stronger, more resilient talent pipeline** and supporting employers who struggle to attract applicants.

### 1. A unique shared apprenticeship scheme across the supply chain

Thames Water funds the only shared apprenticeship model in the UK water sector. Apprentices rotate between multiple employers across the supply chain, gaining experience on major capital infrastructure projects from different perspectives before joining an alumni pool with job opportunities across the network.

This approach significantly increases the number of apprenticeship places available, enabling Thames Water to create more opportunities than it could alone. It also allows SMEs

to participate even if they cannot host an apprentice full-time, helping to build capability and consistency across the sector. Because apprentices gain varied experience and clearer pathways into employment, the model also strengthens retention and progression.

## 2. Influencing employer behaviour through the Infrastructure Strategic Skills Forum (ISSF)

Through ISSF, Thames Water brings together supply chain partners to think beyond immediate vacancies, remove barriers to taking on apprentices, and adopt more inclusive and future-focused practices. By aligning employers around shared standards and encouraging collaboration, ISSF helps multiply the number of opportunities available to young people and improves the overall quality of apprenticeship experiences.

This collective approach supports long-term workforce planning across the water industry, **reducing reliance on short-term recruitment fixes and creating a more stable, predictable talent pipeline.**

## 3. Using immersive engagement to drive action

Thames Water has found that employers are far more likely to create apprenticeship roles when they see the impact first-hand. Workshops, site visits and “seeing is believing” sessions demystify what apprenticeships involve, build employer confidence, and lead to tangible commitments with clear follow-up actions.

This immersive approach turns interest into action, helping employers understand the real value of early-career talent and creating accountability for delivering new opportunities.

## The benefits

- Higher retention and stronger progression, with rates above 80% and up to 92% for recent cohorts.
- A more diverse and inclusive workforce, supported through personalised pastoral care.
- A resilient, future-ready talent pipeline aligned to long-term workforce needs.
- Greater collaboration and consistency across the supply chain, raising standards and widening access.



## Thames Water's advice for other employers

### Gosia Dworska, Head of Emerging Talent and Skills:

**“Invest in structured support – clear expectations, strong pastoral care and confident line managers make a measurable difference to retention and apprentice success.**

Consider your strategic workforce needs and build an apprenticeship offer which will help address current and future skills gaps. Think beyond your own organisation by working with supply chains, training providers and local communities to create more consistent pathways for young people. And offer immersive experiences such as site visits, workshops and ‘seeing is believing’ sessions to truly shift employer behaviour and lead to real, tangible commitments.”

### What's next for Thames Water on apprenticeships?

Thames Water is continuing to expand its Level 2 and 3 offer, strengthen its shared apprenticeship model, and use ISSF to influence the wider sector. The organisation is also developing film content to showcase its apprenticeship approach and highlight the impact of its emerging talent strategy.

With a strong focus on long-term workforce planning, inclusive recruitment and sector collaboration, Thames Water is demonstrating how employers can create meaningful opportunities for young people, and build the skills they need for the future.