



ENERGY &
EFFICIENCY
INDUSTRIAL PARTNERSHIP



INNOVATING CHANGE IMPACTING YOUNG PEOPLE



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OVERVIEW

This case study report describes the approach that water company United Utilities has taken to engage with the opportunity presented by the Energy and Efficiency Industrial Partnership (EEIP) between 2013 and 2015. It has two objectives:

- To inspire other like-minded businesses to take positive and practical action and support the EEIP's ambitions with greater vigour during the pilot period to 2017 and beyond
- To demonstrate to Government that employers really can lead the skills agenda and create real change where it is needed most

The case study with United Utilities confirms that:

- Collaborative action can create solutions that lead to real jobs for young unemployed people
- Without the EEIP, such collaboration would not have happened
- Industry is increasingly shaping the curriculum content for the Apprentices it needs
- Innovative approaches to assessing competence are being created for the water industry
- It is worth companies investing time and resource to support the EEIP's ambitions.
- The EEIP is an important vehicle for driving change, but it really does need the full, proactive support of all those companies signed up to it's ambitions in 2014 for it to reach it's potential

Sally Cabrini, Director of Business Services says: "We must continue to commit to the Industrial Partnership together, because we can shape the skills agenda and ensure that the North West Pilot (the Pilot) is sustainable after 2017."

Louise Beardmore, Head of Organisational Development and Business Change at United Utilities says: "If we get this right, the sum of all the parts will have an impact, but we can't afford for there to be any passengers or problem-admirers. We need really committed firms to demonstrate leadership across the EEIP's various activities."

With a workforce in excess of 5,000 and a commitment to skills and talent development for many years, one might wonder what value added United Utilities could gain from being engaged so proactively with the EEIP.

What was the motivation for United Utilities to engage with the EEIP?

Sally Cabrini explains: "It's partly about tackling a long-standing skills shortage issue for the industry. No single company alone can make the sector attractive enough so working together is vital. But it's also about philosophy. The principle of employer-led approaches to vocational training is better than a government-led model. The EEIP is the best chance we have got as an industry to reduce a long-standing skills gap that is getting worse."

Louise Beardmore agrees and adds: "It's also a moral duty. We are seeking to provide leadership for tackling issues such as youth unemployment. With the main base of our operation in the North West, at the heart of the Northern Powerhouse, this industrial partnership gives us an opportunity to leverage discussions about skills and the STEM based skills agenda for the entire sector, the North and for UK Plc."

Louise is also Vice Chair of the EEIP's Operations Board and notes how collaboration on a variety of activities is underway that might not otherwise have happened.

"We must continue to commit to the EEIP together, because we can shape the skills agenda and ensure that the Pilot is sustainable after 2017."

Sally Cabrini,
Director of Business Services
United Utilities

How has United Utilities engaged with the EEIP?

United Utilities invested time, cash and expertise before the start of the three year EEIP pilot by helping shape its ambition, and this has continued since its formal launch last year with deployment of:

- Senior officers to some of the key governance structures, including the Council and the Operations Board, where expert advice, guidance, leadership and supportive influence is offered where it is most needed – this opens doors to opportunities such as the EEIP sharing a platform with the Skills Minister when the company opened its new Technical Training Centre in Bolton in February 2015; or supporting conversations with the Government to affect policy or funding approaches
- Subject matter experts to specific workstreams and activities such as the development of the Trailblazer Apprenticeships and support for the development of the Energy Efficiency Independent Assessment Service (EEIAS) – which leads to the development of brand new, industry led approaches to assessment that raises the bar for the skills and knowledge that future technicians will have in the industry
- Technical human resource experts to lead the Pilot which seeks to create youth employment opportunities amongst firms in the sector willing to take them on after they receive structured training and support, which leads to highly visible projects to the point where the Prime Minister makes time to visit and learn about it

We would like to shine a light on just two of these activities for the case study:

- The North West Pilot
- Trailblazer Apprenticeship Development

THE NORTH WEST PILOT

A multi-company pilot project to help create youth employment opportunities involving the identification, selection and support of young unemployed people through a 10 week support programme comprising 2 weeks of pre-employment activity and eight weeks of work experience.

What was the problem to be solved?

The North West was chosen for this pilot as there is a disproportionate level of youth unemployment and deprivation in the region with over 16% of young people not in employment, education or training. The EEIP has a significant ambition to address youth unemployment and increase the talent pipelines into the industry. To align with that commitment there was a need for practical action.

How was the solution developed?

United Utilities offered its leadership to turn the concept into a project that would lead to real jobs for young people in the participating companies.

Lynn Johnson, Talent Programme Manager at United Utilities has led the Pilot and explains some of the ways in which the solution was shaped:

"I was asked in April 2014 to support the development of the Pilot. We had a concept; we knew the issues, the rural and urban make up of the region and the need to create opportunities for young people. We had seven companies, including ourselves, and Energy & Utility Skills (EU Skills) showing commitment to make the Pilot happen. We also knew that separately we had different approaches, collateral and resources (e.g. training centres or in-house staff to support the young people) that could be harnessed so a good part of my role initially was in bringing those conversations together. We did some very practical things like bring a map of the region into the room and each of us plotted where geographically – based on our operations – we would be able to offer work placements. As well as understanding what we could all offer, we spent time thinking about the programme itself – the format, the length of time each young person would need to build up their capability as intended and so we considered the balance of pre-employment training and work experience."

It is clear that Lynn also drew heavily on her previous experience as a Business in the Community (BITC) Business Connector as she used her skills to good effect in engaging

with local community organisations that were able, and used to, working with young unemployed people and who would be trusted by those individuals. Lynn explains:

"We carefully identified and worked with these organisations as they would ultimately be responsible for identifying the young people and referring them to us. EU Skills also played a huge part in engaging with stakeholders, such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus, to ensure buy in to the Programme and to negotiate flexibilities that would enable the young people we most wanted to help to engage with the Pilot, without losing their benefits. DWP personnel came to one of our selection days and as a result of that and EU Skills' stakeholder skills we believe that really helped DWP buy-in to what we were trying to achieve."

What has been delivered?

Lynn continues: "We aimed to have something up and running by September 2014, only six months after we started turning the concept of the Pilot into a reality. For that first cohort we had 75 young people referred to us; of which 36 came to selection days we organised. Of these, 13 young people were selected of which 12 went on to participate fully, and nine out of these 12 completed the experience."

The participants were a mix of males and females aged 17-23 who had very different needs, capabilities and qualifications. Lynn said this was a key point:

"We learned that the programme is suitable for people who are ready to make a commitment, not those who cannot or don't wish to – they must be prepared to have a go. This means that initial identification and selection has to be focused."

The Pilot has allowed for the creation of a 10 week programme that has included elements of innovation too. For example, on day two of the pre-employment training, Lynn organised for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to provide some teambuilding work purposely taking participants out of their comfort zone, but with the effect of individuals becoming more confident at addressing their fears and concerns.

What has been the impact?

There has been an impact on a number of levels, but most noticeably for the young people who took part; for the companies that took part who have learned that you really can impact people's lives through joint effort; and for the strategic stakeholders that learned how to make their partnerships and resources work together for a common ambition.

Ultimately, young people have secured real jobs and their achievements were formally recognised at a graduation ceremony at the end of the Programme. Below is just one example of the change that has been created for Zoe who took part in the Pilot. She now works as a Customer Advisor at United Utilities. Jobs have also been secured for participants at E.ON and Amey.

CASE STUDY - ZOE GREEN

My Life Before

"I left college in the summer of 2014 having completed a BTEC Level 3 in Health and Social care and was actively looking for full time roles."



Why I applied for the North West Pilot

"At the age of 17, the prospect of securing a full time job with potential to develop myself seemed impossible. Then I was made aware of the North West pilot by Warrington Youth Club and knew that this was for me and a way of developing my skills and getting into the wider workplace."

What have I learned from the pilot?

"For me, I would say confidence. Before, I would never have got involved in group activities as I lacked confidence in meeting new people especially in large groups. I wouldn't have even asked questions in a classroom environment. The scheme has helped me to overcome this and taught me skills to show me how to be more confident."

What I'm doing today

"I now have a permanent job at United Utilities as a customer advisor. I love my job, the environment, my work colleagues; who would have thought three months ago, that I'd be talking to customers and even better understanding a water bill. I'm very proud of myself and what I've achieved thanks to a great scheme that helps people like myself."

What were the critical success factors and innovations?

With hindsight Lynn observes that there have been some really important ingredients for success, including but not limited to:

"The engagement approach – between the companies that have the jobs and with community organisations that provide the referrals; using participating companies' infrastructure, such as our training centre in Leigh, where the young people were in a business environment with our other employees – this meant they had to up their behaviours and to concentrate properly; interactive, energetic selection days; flexibility of the DWP to enable no disruption to the young person's ability to commit to and complete their experience; and to dedicate time to drive the Pilot and make it happen rapidly".

What's the future plan?

The Pilot has been very visible to the EEIP Council and Operations Board members, and has captured their imagination as a model that can be scaled up and rolled out in other parts of the country, subject to all the right resources being secured in all the right places. The plan currently includes an ambition to deliver 24 cohorts of 12 participants each across 4 regions including the North West, North East, London and the Midlands, bringing opportunities for 288 young people in the next 12 months. This means that new employers and organisations are also stepping up to engage with the Partnership's goals and Lynn hopes that even more employers will become involved.

"It would be great if every organisation in the EEIP got involved and offered at least one placement, and hopefully many more, so that together we can reach into all of the communities in which we operate. I know through experience that it is hard work to get this collaboration going, and you have to be patient, but it is definitely worth it when you realise you can play a part in transforming lives."

Lynn Johnson
Talent Programme Manager
United Utilities

TRAILBLAZER APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT

The energy and utility sector is seeking to double, if not triple, the amount of Apprentices it employs in coming years to mitigate against an ageing workforce.

What was the problem to be solved?

In the water industry the demographic suggests that most employees are middle aged males and there will be a risk of losing skills and knowledge without sufficient forward planning. Whilst there is lots of churn in contact centres and the professional services aspects of the sector, rates are around 2% for the water industry for roles such as water or waste process controllers and maintenance. There is a need to plan a talent pipeline for field based occupations. John Lees, Learning and Development Manager at United Utilities, describes the challenge succinctly: “We need to skill the new generation before the current generation leaves.”

Adding to this workforce demographic challenge, there was also an issue with the quality of the Apprenticeship Framework for the sector. Phil White, Technical Health and Safety Manager at United Utilities explains: “Our driver has always been about quality and raising the capability of our workforce. The Richard Review confirmed what we already knew – that the Apprenticeships were too rigid, didn't match employer requirements and funding was driving the qualifications rather than skills requirement driving the funding. So we needed to do something about it and drive up the quality of new Apprenticeships Standards, the way they are assessed, and the way they actually lead to competent workers.”

How was the solution developed?

United Utilities – through the work of Phil and John – has been playing a leading role in helping reshape two new Apprenticeship Frameworks: the Utilities Engineering Technician; and Utilities Process Technician. This has meant a root and branch review of the content, the purpose of the Apprenticeships, the outcomes they are meant to deliver and the way in which they can be owned and assessed by the industry.

Phil explains: “We've done a lot of work on the assessment strategy and philosophy. We realised that people are driven by qualifications and certification but often you can achieve these

without actually still being competent. That's the problem. What it means is by the time someone comes to us after their qualification we are starting again from scratch because they are not ready to be let loose in a business operationally.”

John concurs: “That makes for more cost to businesses. If you're investing four years in an Apprentice you want them to be capable in the workplace as a result and be effective in the field, for example as a service engineer. I think Phil has really led the work on Trailblazer developments for our sector, along with other companies in the EEIP, with real drive. Much has been achieved in the past 12 months that might not have happened as rapidly.”

What has been delivered?

The work delivered has been of a technical nature. It has engaged experts, including trainers within United Utilities and other companies in the EEIP, to develop pathways for the two standards with an assessment strategy that, according to John and Phil, will be more rigorous, industry-relevant, standardised and fit for purpose than was the case only a year ago.

“Apprenticeships were too rigid, didn't match employer requirements and funding was driving the qualifications rather than skills requirement driving the funding. So we needed to do something about it and drive up the quality of new Apprenticeships Standards, the way they are assessed, and the way they actually lead to competent workers.”

Phil White
Technical Health & Safety Manager
United Utilities

What has been the impact?

Once the new Standards have been approved, this will allow Apprentices to be recruited under the new framework so it's too early to talk about impact. However, John and Phil are certain that the future impact will be great for United Utilities and the entire water sector.

Phil says: "Our end game is to standardise skills and capability in the sector. These Trailblazers, and the innovative assessment strategy that accompanies them, provide a more robust way of measuring competence for every Apprentice in every firm in the sector that employs them. That means the return will be worth it in terms of reduced business cost." John adds: "The industry gets what it wants. Whereas before there were too many processes and it felt like getting a glacier to move. Now it is in our gift to change it, and change the standards rapidly."

What were the critical success factors and innovations?

Phil thinks that the EEIP has created the conditions for companies in the water sector to be more open with each other than they were before. Moreover, the groups that have come together for this technical work have had a more action-oriented approach than previous steering group iterations that were trying to tackle the problem but only got as far as sharing ideas rather than actually driving change. The compressed timetable for delivering the new standards has meant pressure for the participating firms, juggling their own business as usual and job roles, but that sense of urgency has also catalysed a sense of the industry wanting to demonstrate (to Government) just how quickly it can pull things together when the ambition is shared.

Within United Utilities, the way in which the work has been supported by subject matter experts has led to some very positive benefits for staff development including those employed in the new Bolton Technical Training Centre. Their involvement has been a success factor because, as John explains: "A year ago they were turning spanners, and now they're shaping the future."

Phil highlights the innovative aspects of the assessment strategy for the Standards: "You can improve content and delivery in almost anything, but it's the end point assessment – the measurement of actual competence of an individual – that's the important bit, and we think we've come up with something quite unique which includes a range of trade tests, scenario tests and a variety of activities that take individuals out of their comfort zone. This new approach should significantly affect the way companies in our sector do things

in future, and it will be exciting to share these approaches once the standards and assessment strategies have been approved by the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS) in 2015."

What's the future plan?

Assuming approval, there should be an intake of 100 Apprentices on the two pathways from September 2015, essentially the pioneers for the new standards. Phil says: "By the time these Apprentices finish in three to four years' time the approaches we have come up with should have taken root in the wider sector and so maintaining content is more about refreshing and tweaking. And although the EEIAS is in its infancy, in principle it provides the opportunity for industry ownership and a rapidity that isn't possible through the existing structure and rigidity of awarding organisations. We will take a leap of faith and will work through it."

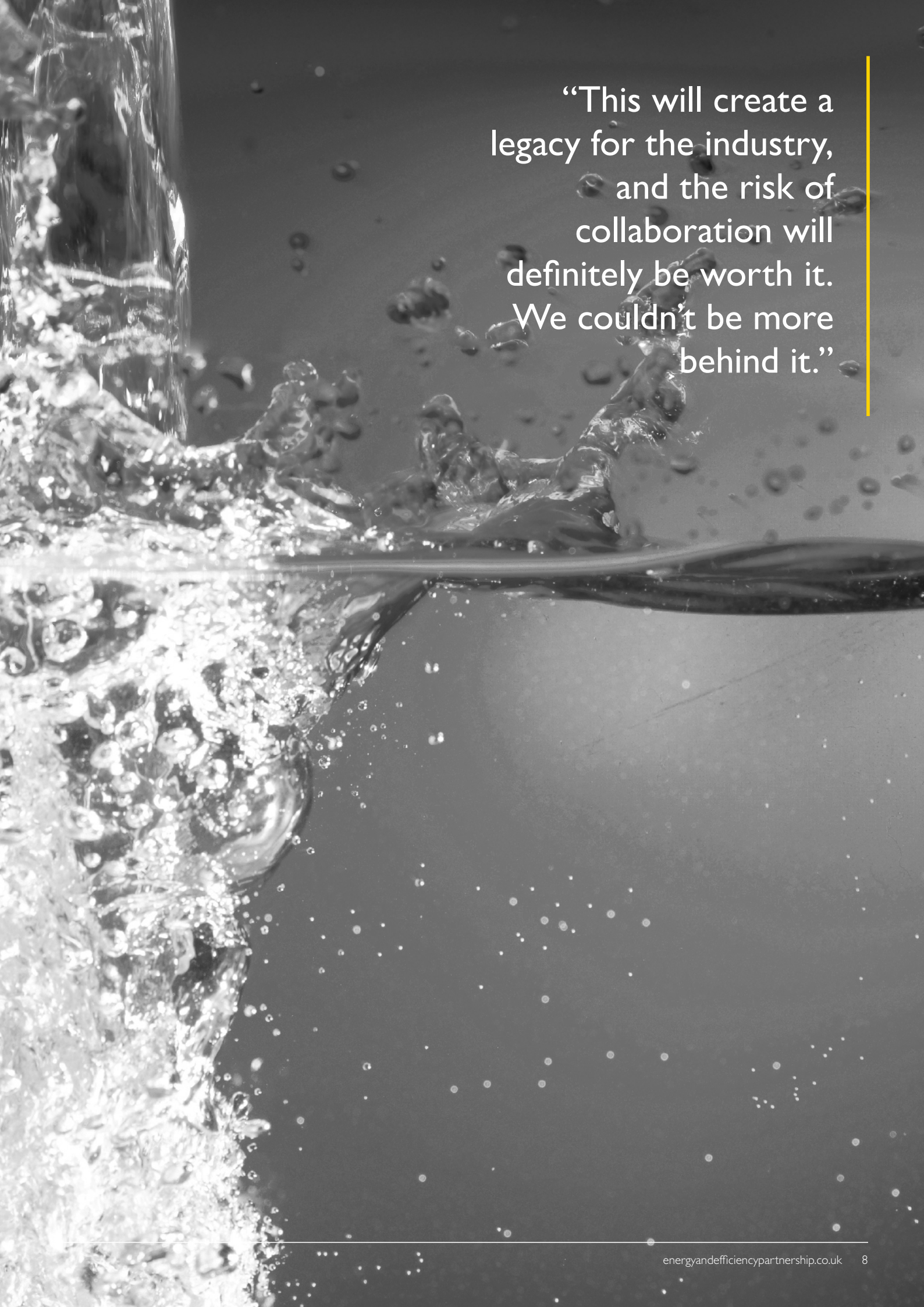
John concludes: "We couldn't sit on the side-lines and say things aren't fit for purpose and not do anything about it. This will create a legacy for the industry, and the risk of collaboration will definitely be worth it. We couldn't be more behind it."

A video has also been produced highlighting the development of the Water Process Technician Trailblazer Apprenticeship:

Waste Management & Water Trailblazer Apprenticeships: Transforming Industries, Changing Lives 2

Acknowledgements: EU Skills would like to thank the staff at United Utilities for allowing the EEIP's independent evaluator, Alan Graver of Skyblue Research Ltd, to visit them at their Warrington offices on the 8 May 2015 and being so generous with their time to explain their approach, activities and hopes for the future.

Disclaimer: The information presented in the case study was thought to be correct at time of publication, May 2015, but the author cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions. The views expressed are not those of the EEIP or EU Skills, but rather reflect the opinions expressed by members of United Utilities when formally interviewed by the evaluator in May 2015.



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