

APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT SCHEME GOES VIRTUAL

M Group Services' training scheme, endorsed by Energy & Utility Skills, allows apprentices to gain industry-recognised learning despite COVID-19 challenges.

Having already benefitted from Energy & Utility Skills endorsing its Customer Service training course, it was the logical step for M Group Services' Emerging Talent Team (ETT) to also get their Apprenticeship Development Scheme (ADS) endorsed. Successfully going through the endorsement process with Energy & Utility Skills allowed M Group Services to demonstrate the quality of their programme and benefit from advice, guidance and support for their training function. Learners who successfully complete their training scheme also receive formal recognition of their learning with an EUSR registration.

M Group Services has an ongoing commitment to the sector-wide Apprenticeship Pledge launched by the Energy & Utilities Skills Partnership in July 2020. As struggling industries and employers across the UK pause, or are forced to end their programmes, those that sign the pledge state their commitment to continuing apprenticeships. The ETT researched new ways of delivering their apprenticeship training to reduce face-to-face contact following the challenges brought about by COVID-19. They had to consider the impact on their contracts as well as cost, and the outcome of their research led to the introduction of some remote training using video conferencing systems, which further embedded their blended learning approach.





Training

ADS delivers a holistic approach to the apprentices' learning journey. The training has a 3 to 5-day induction, five 2-day Personal Development Sessions (PDP), a community project, a team building programme and a Health & Wellbeing toolkit.

In September 2020, the first virtual induction was successfully delivered via Microsoft Teams. The new virtual induction is scheduled over two weeks via six 90-minute sessions, and includes all the key elements, such as health, safety & wellbeing, guest speakers and personal development. This has been hugely successful and the ETT believes this new approach will give additional flexibility when adapting to any future changes, such as a reintroduction of lockdown or restricted travel, during which they will be able to continue the personal and professional development of their apprentices.

Session three of the five Personal Development Sessions looks at the impact of communication, inclusion and bias, as well as providing an opportunity for apprentices to present on their own community-based projects. This is now being delivered through a 2-part virtual workshop, which can be delivered to a maximum of 6 people. Apprentices on the WPD, UKPN and Thames Water contracts recently began their Personal Development Sessions, and both the apprentices themselves and their Line Managers have provided positive feedback about these sessions.

"The sessions are really good as they allow us to catch up, and not miss out on our development sessions. I really like the flexibility that the sessions provide as we can be anywhere in the country."

Mohammed Siddique Rehman – Level 3 Power Apprentice from WPD Contract

"The virtual sessions have been a great success, in what has been a very challenging year. It has enabled us to continue developing our apprentices, while reducing the impact on the operational side of the business. The feedback from the apprentices continues to be positive and they have seen how the sessions have added value to their programme and their personal journey."

Jayne Ellison – National Apprenticeship Manager, M Group Services

There has been some unavoidable impact on the ADS, but M Group Services has recovered this by holding catch up and re-orientation sessions to recap on the programme delivery to date, as well as using pre-work as a means to reinstate some of the learning. The impact of COVID-19 on people's jobs and mental health, as well as the progression of the ADS programme, has formed part of open discussions at quarterly 'coffee & cake' sessions that have been introduced.

Having the ADS endorsed by Energy & Utility Skills confirms the quality of the training delivered. M Group Services felt it was important for apprentices to achieve something tangible at the end of the apprenticeship in the form of an EUSR registration. This has been a crucial factor in attracting people to M Group Services and its operating businesses and where the ETT has showcased their approach at career days. Having a quality mark recognised by industry, as well as including valuable transferable skills, is of huge value. There are currently 62 apprentices benefiting from being enrolled on the ADS, with a further 30 commencing later in the year.

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