

Skills shortages the real headline for the water industry

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While debates over bonus payments, funding and hygiene have stolen the headlines, the real issue facing the water industry over the next six years is staffing. That's according to specialist recruiter, Water by Murray.

The recruiter has warned employers that the major skills shortages impacting the sector could impact many of the key projects earmarked for AMP8, which starts in 2025.

Water by Murray's Water Industry Labour Report, which surveyed nearly 4,000 specialist engineers, found that 'skills and recruitment' was listed as the single biggest issue facing the water industry, ahead of ageing infrastructure, pollution and funding. The firm has warned that, unless drastic measures are taken, many projects simply won't be able to get off the ground due to a lack of available skills. To add to these fears, almost 70% of the existing engineering workforce is planning on taking a role in a different sector in the next 12 months, namely the oil and gas, and nuclear, industries.

Adam Cave, founder and managing director of Water by Murray, part of Murray McIntosh, commented.

"The news is full of stories around bonus payments, government funding and sewage, but in reality, the biggest problem facing water is staffing. The sector itself is truly pivotal, but it's no exaggeration to say that without some serious action, many critical maintenance and expansion projects simply won't be deliverable in AMP8. The UK has an ageing infrastructure and with population numbers rising, major transformation is needed, and that can only be delivered by the right people. The ongoing debates feel like they're ignoring the real issue and in order for other problems to be tackled there must be a greater focus on staffing."

"Ultimately, employers need to find a way to get more people to opt for a career in the water industry. That's a long-term solution, in the short-term firms can navigate the skill-short market by leveraging the contingent workforce, as well as recruiting from other markets. The sector has been pillaged for skills for years by the likes of nuclear, and oil & gas, and it's now time for water employers to do the same and return the favour. Water, along with the likes of energy and healthcare, is one of the fields that truly keeps the country ticking, so we need to ensure that talent pipelines are robust and built to last."