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From oily rags to riches

ABM UK unveils bold plan to change perceptions of an industry rich with opportunity

Oily rags, overalls and ‘no prospects’ have become synonymous with engineering and facilities management professionals, despite offering a pathway that promises no university debt and fantastic earning potential.

With a skills gap already threatening whether facilities management firms can literally keep the lights on for clients, one company has taken matters in-hand, launching a pilot programme and media campaign aimed at attracting new talent.

On Monday 4 December 2017, leading facilities management services provider, [ABM UK](#), welcomed 36 West London schoolchildren and their parents to the launch of its first-ever Junior Engineering Engagement Programme (J.E.E.P) at its employee training centre in Greenford, Middlesex. In her role as an advocate of the campaign, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) ambassador and former Tomorrow’s World presenter Kate Bellingham spoke to children and their parents about the unique opportunity the initiative offers.

The move recognises that despite government initiatives like The Apprenticeship Levy and the introduction of T levels, businesses have a responsibility to safeguard the future, too.

The Programme's vision originated from ABM UK's group managing director, Andy Donnell, who started his career as an apprentice electrician when he was 16-years-old. Donnell successfully worked his way up the career ladder to oversee the acquisition of Westway Services (now ABM UK) by American services giant, [ABM](#), and now holds the chief role at the award-winning company.

ABM UK’s group managing director, Andy Donnell, says: “This industry has an image problem that we need to change. People either don’t know about the opportunities that facilities management and engineering offer or they think it’s about oily rags and no prospects. This couldn’t be further from the truth; in fact, these technical roles are in such high demand that

graduate apprentices are earning between £26,000 and £30,000 just a year after qualifying... and they have no debt!

"As an industry, we have a responsibility to start attracting fresh, young talent, and we believe that the J.E.E.P is a fantastic first step towards doing that. But it can't be a flash in the pan: making the industry appeal to the next generation of talent is a monumental challenge, and changes won't happen overnight, which is why we see this as a long-term, industry-wide campaign."

ABM UK's J.E.E.P launched just weeks after the UK Government officially announced its landmark campaign, the Year of Engineering, which recognises the significant impact the skills shortage is having on the UK's engineering industry's productivity and growth. The campaign is pledging to work with industry partners to offer a million direct and inspiring experiences of engineering to young people throughout 2018.

Supported by a team of educational experts, ABM UK has developed an immersive syllabus, which will be delivered to 36 Year Seven children from three London Borough of Ealing secondary schools: Northolt High School, Brentside High School, and Featherstone High School.

Running from January to July 2018, the pilot programme will engage pupils in engineering and facilities management with interactive sessions, and educate them that careers in these sectors are full of opportunities and earning potential. Topics covered will include electrics, cooling and sustainability, while field trips to London's Heathrow Airport and Transport for London's train maintenance facility will explain how engineering plays out in a career setting.

At the end of the programme the children will be awarded a certified qualification from industry body, [the British Institute of Facilities Management \(BIFM\)](#), which will work as a credit towards an apprenticeship or further course should they decide to pursue a career in the industry when they leave school.

Linda Hausmanis, chief executive of the BIFM, commented: "The BIFM is absolutely delighted to work alongside ABM UK on this initiative. For many years the demographic time bomb facing FM has been much lauded and finding ways to encourage young people into FM as a career of choice has been a long-held ambition of the Institute. I wish the 36 young people every success with the programme and, who knows, one day one of them may be heralded as the "FM Newcomer of the Year" like Conrad Dinsmore was at the [BIFM Awards 2017](#)."

ABM UK has already collaborated with generous suppliers and clients who see the value in taking action, and the company will be looking at competitors for their involvement as the initiative develops. Following the pilot, ABM UK aims to take the J.E.E.P on tour in a bespoke mobile hub – a state-of-the-art double-decker bus that will take the excitement and opportunity of engineering and facilities management to children across the country, in their own environments.

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ADDITIONAL NOTES & QUOTES

The facilities management industry's workforce is ageing, and according to the BIFM's Business Confidence Monitor for 2017, 22% of nearly 500 MD, CEO and senior management respondents believe that shortages of skilled staff will impact the success of their business over the next 12 months.

Engineer, STEM advocate, former presenter of the BBC science show Tomorrow's World, and supporter of the J.E.E.P, Kate Bellingham, commented: "I'm really pleased to be involved with ABM UK's J.E.E.P initiative. Much of my work during the past two decades has been about promoting opportunities in engineering. It is genuinely exciting for me to be working with a company which is piloting such an innovative programme while still being keen to take onboard the lessons from past initiatives – and what better time to launch than to coincide with the Year of Engineering."

One of ABM UK's current employees, 24-year-old Marissa Francis, is testament to the benefits that choosing an apprenticeship and a career in the facilities management industry can bring. Francis won an industry-leading 'Apprentice of the Year' award in 2017; she is earning in excess of £26,000 per year; and importantly earned while she was learning her trade at ABM UK and has no university debt.

Marissa Francis, HVAC Improver and graduate apprentice at ABM UK, commented: "After leaving college I was unsure what I wanted to do – there just wasn't much, if any, careers guidance

available. There was also a lot of pressure to go to university; but I wanted to get hands-on experience, to learn essential skills in practice rather than in theory, and to start earning as soon as possible. I applied for and was eventually accepted on to ABM UK's apprenticeship programme, which gave me the opportunity to earn while I was learning. For me, it was a perfect fit, and I wish I had known about this kind of opportunity much earlier, particularly when I was at school."

Miss Thurka Jeyachandran, Head of Applied Sciences, STEM and Science enrichment, Featherstone High School, commented: "STEM is so important to every part of our lives; however, there is currently a large gap between girls and boys in STEM-related subjects, as well as a huge gap in the engineering field.

"I and my wonderful 12 Year 7 students are very excited to be working with ABM UK to excite and encourage our students, especially the young females in the group to take on this project and to develop skills to help them pursue STEM subjects in school, and a future STEM-based career."

Dr. Naveed Malik, physics teacher, Brentside High School, commented: "The J.E.E.P programme offers a fantastic opportunity for our students to experience first-hand, what "engineering" really means. Through its use of immersive and hands-on activities, the J.E.E.P is likely to change perceptions, of students and parents alike, about what a career in engineering entails. Furthermore, with the participation of young role models from the world of work, we are looking forward to the J.E.E.P having a long-term impact on pupils' lives."

Miss Vicky Jones, Subject Leader for Science, Northolt High School, commented: "I am really passionate about students achieving their potential in every aspect of their lives, and some cannot always do this in an academic sense. Schools are driven to produce students who can academically progress, but we all know this isn't for everybody, and certainly not manageable for the future.

"The J.E.E.P is such an exciting opportunity for a number of Northolt High School's Year 7 students, who will gain hands-on experience in real life situations, and actually link their school work to the 'real world'. I am sure that working with people in facilities management and engineering will steer their ideas to what is actually available in the world of work.

"I am so grateful to ABM UK for allowing us to be part of something so exciting and really believe these young people will massively benefit from this amazing opportunity."

Image caption: (adults from L-R) Miss Vicky Jones, Subject Leader for science, Northholt High School; Adam Baker, business development and marketing director, ABM UK; The Worshipful The Mayor of the London Borough of Ealing, Councillor Simon Woodrooffe; and Kate Bellingham are joined by Year 7 students from Northholt High School.

Image credit: ABM UK

ABOUT ABM UK

ABM UK employs just over 7,000 people with offices in London, Glasgow, Belfast, Dublin, Leeds, Bolsover, Luton and Stevenage, and current customers include retail and leisure venues, major international banks and law firms, museums, public buildings, transportation centres and airports.

ABM UK's comprehensive capabilities include cleaning, security, electrical & lighting, energy solutions, facilities engineering, HVAC & mechanical, data centre cleaning, landscape & turf, and parking, provided through standalone or integrated solutions. ABM UK provides custom facility solutions in urban, suburban and rural areas to properties of all sizes — from shopping centres to commercial buildings, data centres, manufacturing plants and airports.

ABM UK will continue to grow the business organically, focusing on showing clients the benefits of integrated facility solutions, its self-delivery model and its investment in people, of which ABM UK's state-of-the-art training centre in Greenford, Middlesex is the most permanent statement of intent. ABM UK has a comprehensive apprenticeship programme, as well as a scholarship scheme that allows people who made a false start in life to learn a trade.

ABM UK is a subsidiary of ABM, a leading provider of facility solutions with revenues of approximately \$5.1 billion and over 130,000 employees in 350+ offices throughout the United States and various international locations. ABM Industries Incorporated, which operates through its subsidiaries, was founded in 1909.

For more information, please visit www.abm.co.uk

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