drax

Case study

Lessons learnt from Covid-19

How Drax adapted its work experience programme during Covid-19

Drax has been a Corporate Member of EngineeringUK for over 2 years and was the first Signatory of The Tomorrow's Engineers Code from the energy sector. We asked Jane Breach who has been involved in the development of the Drax virtual work experience programme to tell us how they changed its delivery from face-to-face to virtual because of Covid-19. As well as finding out about how Drax works with Engineering UK across its outreach programmes.

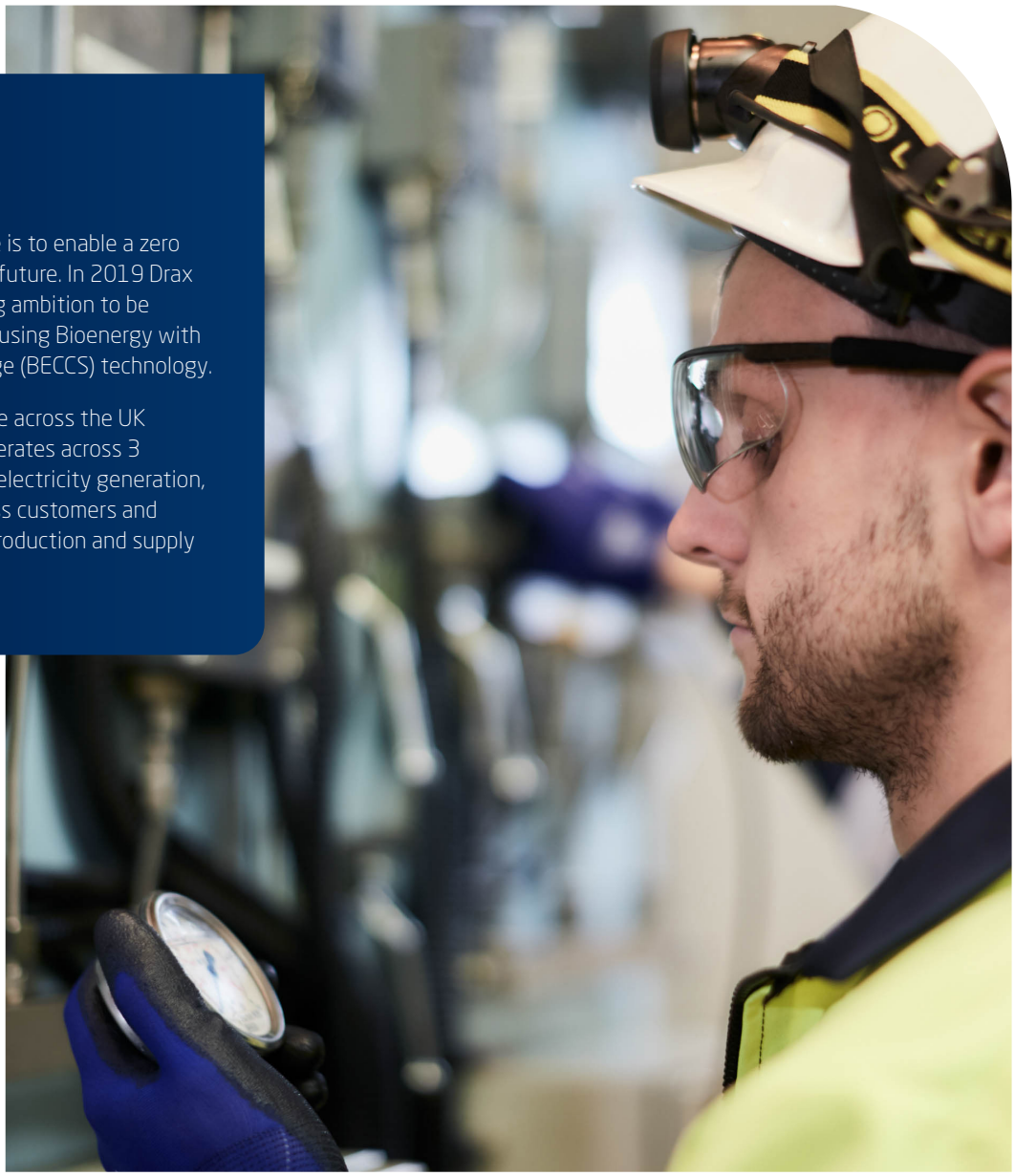
Jane has worked for Drax in a community engagement role for over 8 years. Jane's understanding of engineering and how it fits in the curriculum and government agenda has been largely influenced by a desire to inspire young people, contribute towards the levelling up and net zero agenda. Before working for Drax she was at Doosan Babcock for over 10 years, working in a commercial capacity at a variety of thermal generators across the UK.

EngineeringUK

About Drax

The Drax Group purpose is to enable a zero carbon, lower cost energy future. In 2019 Drax announced a world-leading ambition to be carbon negative by 2030, using Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) technology.

Drax employs 3,400 people across the UK and North America and operates across 3 principal areas of activity: electricity generation, electricity sales to business customers and compressed wood pellet production and supply to third parties.



Power generation

Drax UK owns and operates a portfolio of renewable electricity generation assets in England and Scotland. The assets include the UK's largest power station, based at Selby, North Yorkshire, which supplies 5% of the country's electricity needs.

Having converted Drax Power Station to use sustainable biomass instead of coal it has become the **UK's biggest renewable power generator and the largest decarbonisation project in Europe**.

It is also where Drax is piloting the ground-breaking negative emissions technology BECCS within its Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) incubation area.

Its pumped storage hydro power facility in Scotland includes Cruachan Power Station, a facility within the hollowed-out mountain Ben Cruachan.

How Drax adapted its work experience programme during Covid-19

Driving innovation in the industry is not only about re-skilling the current workforce, but also about equipping the future generation with the skills required for the green jobs of the future.

Drax wanted to develop a programme that could be delivered remotely during the Pandemic and provide a valuable and authentic experience, with the following ambitions:

- ✓ **Support current and future apprenticeship** needs within the business and to provide a talent pipeline for future vacancies
- ✓ **Reinforce Drax's social impact strategy** focusing on **social mobility** and **levelling up** opportunities for young people called Mobilising a million. This initiative aims to improve skills, education, employability, and opportunity for **1 million people by 2025**. Drax is working with trade unions and businesses in the north to galvanise support for enhanced jobs and skills for the region

Drax offered young people a virtual insight into the world of work as part of the company's continued support for STEM education and supporting its social impact strategy.

The virtual work experience programme runs online during the school holidays, providing young people with an insight into working in the energy sector.

Drax power station usually hosts dozens of young people during its work experience programmes each year, as well as thousands of visitors from schools and colleges who enjoy free educational tours.

However, during lockdown all educational visits to the site had to stop, to reduce infection risks and protect Drax's keyworkers who operate its power stations, keeping the lights on for millions of homes and businesses across England and Scotland.

To make sure young people are not missing out on the valuable knowledge they gain from work experience, Drax put together a 2-week virtual work experience programme.

The objective of this programme is to help make sure that the country has the skilled workforce needed to support a sustainable economic recovery post-Covid-19.

Drax Group's Head of Sustainable Business, Alan Knight, said:

> "We work closely with schools in our communities to inspire children from all backgrounds to study STEM subjects, so the next generation has the education and skills needed to support businesses like ours as we continue to develop and grow."

> "Virtual work experience builds on the work we did during lockdown to provide laptops, free internet access and virtual tours of the power station to ensure no students were left behind in their studies."

Drax is committed to supporting the communities local to its operations. It has invested more than **£840,000** to support its customers and local communities during Covid-19, including donating **1,200** laptops to schools and colleges across the country, helping to make sure children without access to computers or the internet at home did not fall behind. Those who run Drax's outreach and education programmes work closely with local schools to offer a range of work experience placements. Young people benefit from a 1- or 2-week placement in a variety of departments, such as:

- Corporate – Communications, Facilities, Finance, HR, IT, Legal, Logistics, Procurement and Trading
- Production – Chemistry, Engineering, Generation, Health and Safety, Maintenance and Materials Handling

Overview of programme

Drax identified 4 business areas across the group with critical skills needs in 2021. The first cohort for the virtual work experience programme included 24 participants. The programme involved learning about the business area each student had applied to learn more about, as well as sessions on employability and self-development.

The curriculum for the first cohort was designed to give a balance of employability skills, career conversations with colleagues and a project. The feedback from the end of placement questionnaire highlighted areas to finesse for the next cohort. The programme length was increased, adding more colleague conversations on careers, and what an average day looks like. Sessions were made slightly shorter, and more interactivity built in.

Areas of business and number of places offered

- Engineering (6 places)
- Business support (6 places)
- Finance/Trading/Market Analysis (6 places)
- IT/Cyber/Project Management (6 places)

How does Drax work in partnership with EngineeringUK through Corporate Membership?

Building strategic partnerships and networks

Being a Corporate Member of EngineeringUK means Drax can access a network of other organisations that have similar objectives in their education and outreach activity. This has had a positive impact Drax's social impact strategy.

Corporate Membership with EngineeringUK includes an invitation to a **quarterly Business and Industry Panel and working groups**. This provided Drax with an opportunity to take part in a virtual work experience working group, which helped develop The Careers & Enterprise Company virtual work experience microsite - rich with information and resources from employers and organisations to help deliver virtual work experience and provide a framework for the Drax work experience programme based on best practice that supported the Gatsby benchmarks.

Developing a virtual programme from scratch also provided Drax with an opportunity to deliver new, inspiring, and engaging content and experience.

Jane Breach, Drax Community Engagement Team Leader, said:

"We are so grateful to EngineeringUK for the wealth of expertise and advice they provided us with when putting together our virtual work experience programme, allowing us to develop an engaging and beneficial experience for young people"

Shaping the development of a strategic vision and a focused outreach programme

As a Corporate Member, Drax drew insight from EngineeringUK research, including the Gender disparity in engineering and Social mobility in engineering briefings, these were used to inform thinking and planning for the virtual work experience programmes. From these briefings, Drax identified goals and objectives for their work experience programmes. A specific outcome of this was Drax signing the Social Mobility Pledge and boost social mobility for a million people by 2025, as part of its Mobilising a million strategy.

EngineeringUK also worked with Drax and helped to incorporate these insights into their programmes, developing a framework to establish a sustainable long-term plan to deliver impactful interactions throughout a young person's academic journey within the Drax Power Station cluster school network. This strengthened Drax's social impact strategy, helping to demonstrate the rationale for their executives, raising its profile and securing buy in.

Find out about corporate membership

Creating new careers resources and engineering engagement opportunities

A natural process of building the work experience programme was for Drax to develop careers resources. Drax had also been developing educational resources for teachers and young people. The comprehensive application process highlighted a need to further expand educational resources to include more career pathway content.

To widen the audience Drax also made their webinars available on Neon. Neon is an online platform run by EngineeringUK and showcases the UK's best engineering experiences, inspiring careers resources and stories to help teachers bring STEM to life with real world examples of engineering.

Brilliant Inspiration

Find out about being a Neon contributor

TOMORROW'S ENGINEERS | CODE

The Tomorrow's Engineers Code

The Tomorrow's Engineers Code aligned perfectly with Drax's commitment to raise the aspirations of more young people from diverse communities. Drax became a founding Signatory to The Code working with EngineeringUK and other organisations in the community to improve the quality, inclusivity, targeting and reach of activities designed to inspire young people.

Find out about joining The Code

Jane Breach, Drax Community Engagement Team Leader, said:

"Our relationship manager Annette Valentine provided a wealth of expertise and advice when formulating our education strategy with our cluster schools. When she mentioned the virtual work experience working group, we jumped at the chance to join. We understood our end point of delivering a virtual programme but the whys, hows and type of content was still a mystery"

"The group led by EngineeringUK was partially a deep dive into delivery using case studies from other members on their Virtual Work Experience Working Group programmes including learning from their experiences. As well as information on developing content with presentations from CEC, Edge Foundation, North East Local Enterprise Partnership and Northumbria University, Skills Builder Framework and Accenture"

"The knowledge delivered allowed us to develop a framework for our own programme, based on best practice and content that supported the careers Gatsby Benchmarks. Developing a programme from scratch meant we could invigorate the content and experience that young people received from our ork experience. The programme was a mixture of deep learning about the business area the student has applied to and employability/self-development sessions"

Delivering the work placement virtually allowed participants to:

- **Gain different perspectives from different levels of the organisation**, from members of the senior leadership team to apprentices at the start of their careers
- **Have a more holistic overview of the company**, previously work experience participants had been based at different sites, offices, and business areas, the new programme ensured a more balanced overview whilst catering for the talent pipeline in different areas of the company
- **Understand a variety of job roles**, employees provide their own personal career journeys
- **Take part in a real-life project** encouraging young people to research their own ideas, providing unique and original concepts that subsequently provoke further exploration by some of the business areas
- **Review their employability skills**, supported by Drax's HR early careers team, including their professional advice, coaching, unpicking skills to highlight in CVs or job applications, real life interview questions and advice on career pathways

Highlights

- ☑ **95% said that the placement will help enhance their CV and personal statement**
- ☑ **90% said that the placement gave them an insight into the industry**
- ☑ **85% feel excited and confident about their future career**
- ☑ **80% know the business area they might like to work in**
- ☑ **85% know the entry routes to get a job at Drax**

Drax's biggest problem turned out to be their greatest asset

Having zero experience of virtual delivery meant Drax could not rely on previous knowledge. This forced Drax to thoroughly research and investigate virtual education experiences, outcomes and understand what young people need to get out of a work placement experience. **The support of EngineeringUK programmes has been indispensable in achieving this**.

Delivering a virtual programme also allowed Drax to extend its geographic reach and broaden the diversity of young people attending.

What next?

Feedback from participants has been incorporated into future programmes. Drax received such a volume of high-quality applications for the second cohort that they have increased the number of places on offer, increasing the programme's reach and impact.

The experience of developing a virtual work placement programme from scratch, has also provided an opportunity to a re-evaluate the traditional work experience programme.

Drax sees a hybrid approach as the future pathway for work experience, layering the traditional experience with group virtual sessions across the business and supported with the invaluable employability skills development.

What participants said

"The virtual interview was a great task as it really helped me to come out of my comfort zone and build my confidence"

"The CV building and interview preparation sessions really helped to build my confidence and the presentation was great for practicing my communication skills. After this week's activities I'm now sure that a career in IT is right for me"

"My proudest moment was when I finished presenting my research to some of the head engineers at Drax and I received some great feedback. They helped me realise that you don't necessarily have to go to university to become an engineer and that apprenticeships are a great way to get into the industry. I'm now thinking of applying for an engineering apprenticeship at Drax in the future"

"I got to see engineering in a whole new light and learnt about job roles that I didn't know existed before, but am now looking into"