

Case Study

Equans x The Skill Mill

Second chances at work: a case study of a Equans' partnership with The Skill Mill a Social Enterprise employing ex-offenders.



1. Equans background

Equans in the UK & Ireland, Equans is a provider of technical, FM, regeneration and energy services – with specialist capabilities in smart buildings, green mobility, district & embedded energy and decentralised renewables.

Equans' 13,500 UK & Ireland employees combine these activities to help businesses, public sector organisations and government to embrace the energy transition towards net zero, and also the digital & industrial transitions that are redesigning the way we move, work and live.

Equans is committed to being a Responsible Business and making an impact through our operations. Equans IMPACT Charter was established as a framework to measure how we deliver on this goal and is centred on seven key commitments including, responsible procurement, environmental and social responsibility, diversity and inclusion, ethics and health and safety. Equans is partner in Buy Social Corporate Challenge – an initiative that brings together a group of high-profile businesses is aiming to collectively spend £1 billion with social enterprises through their procurement.

2. About the project

One of the recent projects that the company has taken on is providing external site maintenance services for the government. The work involved tasks like fence painting and upkeep of the property.

As a socially responsible company, Equans aims to work with social enterprises. Equans was on the lookout for a suitable supplier who could deliver high-quality services while aligning with the company's values. During the search for a supplier, we had to evaluate various factors, such as the supplier's credibility, expertise, and social responsibility practices. Equans has an extensive list of potential social enterprises as a partner in Social Enterprise UK's Buy Social Corporate Challenge.

After careful consideration, Equans found a suitable social enterprise that could provide the required services – The Skill Mill. The selected supplier not only met the company's quality standards but also shared similar values and social responsibility practices.

3. The Skill Mill background

The Skill Mill is a multi-award-winning social enterprise which provides employment opportunities for young people aged between sixteen and eighteen. The Skill Mill was established in 2013. They employ only ex-offenders, actively reducing reoffending whilst increasing engagement, participation, employability, and educational levels of the young people to increase their life chances.

The Skill Mill is supported by an Advisory Board of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is this partnership which makes the Skill Mill unique and brings significant added value.

In 9 years, The Skill Mill has employed 348 young people in the UK. Just 27 of those have been re-convicted. This means their re-conviction rate is just 7.7%, compared to a counterfactual of 72% for young offenders with 11+ convictions. 75% of the young people The Skill Mill has employed have progressed to further employment, education, or training.

4. Transforming Lives: how work has positively impacted Young Offenders

For young offenders, finding employment can be a challenging feat. However, for those who are able to secure a job, it can provide a path towards positive change and rehabilitation. The Skill Mill helps young people become work ready by providing employment opportunities in water and land-based management, helping to reduce flood risk and improve the local environment. Young People acquire knowledge and skills by working alongside local private contractors and partners. Each Skill Mill cohort receives six months paid employment, invaluable practical real work experience, a nationally recognized qualification, and further opportunities for progression with local companies at the end of their time with The Skill Mill.

The Equans / Skill Mill partnership has provided real opportunities for young people on the programme. These are the inspiring stories of the young people who were once offenders and were given chance by The Skill Mill and worked with Equans on their Norfolk site. Their work experiences have impacted and changed their lives for the better, illustrating clearly that the impact of work on individuals goes beyond financial gain. It can also have a transformative effect on personal growth and development.

Danny

Danny first came to the attention of Norfolk Youth Justice Service (NYJS) in November 2019. During this time, he was offered out of court diversion interventions for several offences, In March 2022, Danny was sentenced in court to a 6-month Referral Order which he has gone on to successfully complete in December 2022. Since this offence, Danny has not gone on to reoffend. When Danny started working with the YJS in March 2022, he had a lot of unstructured spare time and was getting involved with peers who weren't a positive influence on him. Danny also struggled to regulate his emotions which caused problems within his home environment.

Speaking with Danny, he voiced that working with The Skill Mill has really helped him turn his life around and he is grateful for the opportunity of working with Skill Mill and this will help him go on to find further work. He shared he likes being able to earn his own wage and have money to buy his own things. He enjoys working with the other boys and feels they work well as a team.

Danny's views regarding Skill Mill and Supervisor, David:

"Skill Mill is great, it's for people who thought they weren't going to get a chance in life and helps you turn your life around. David, he's just too good, helps you with everything, can't fault him. If you feel like you're stuck, people around are the best thing for you. As long as you stick to work, you see an improvement in yourself. I feel that anything that gets thrown at me I can resolve, everything is falling into place. I know what I've got to do, Skill Mill helps you look at things from another perspective – don't need to rush, got all the time in the world to make things right".

Danny indicated that working with Skill Mill has helped him deal with his anger and says, "I now control my anger, it doesn't control me".

Eddie

Eddie first came to the attention of Norfolk Youth Justice Service (NYJS) in October 2018. During this time, he received out of court diversion interventions for several offences, In April 2022, Eddie was sentenced in court to a 6-month Referral Order which he has gone on to successfully complete in November 2022. Since this offence, Eddie has not gone on to reoffend. When Eddie started working with the YJS in April 2022, he presented as very shy and lacked confidence. He had nothing to do in his spare time and lacked motivation in thinking about his future. Relationships with his family were at time tense and he got frustrated very quickly.

Eddie speaks positively about Skill Mill and it is clear that he enjoys working. He feels that he gets treated like an adult, not like when he was at school. He feels respected by the rest of the team and in turn, respects them also. Eddie likes having his own money, he has been able to save up for a tracksuit which he was proud of buying. Eddie also likes being able to help with the family bills and “do his bit” he gives his mum money towards the outgoings each week.

Eddie suffered a bereavement prior to starting work and feels David and the rest of the team helped him get through this. Eddie voiced: “On the days I couldn’t get up and felt really sad I knew the rest of the team would get me through and keep me busy, we have a laugh together”.

Eddie’s views regarding Skill Mill and Supervisor David:

“It kept me out of trouble, I can now knuckle down. It’s helped with my future; I now feel like I could get another job and make something of myself. I was shy before and hated meeting new people, it’s helped me with my confidence, and I don’t worry about things as much. Dave has given us as much help as he can, I wouldn’t be here without Skill Mill. I’ve enjoyed everything about it”.

Ronny

Ronny’s mother said the following: Since starting Skill Mill, he has changed **so** much. He doesn’t start arguments with his brothers, he gives me £50 a week towards rent, he doesn’t go out as much and certainly not as late in the evening. He has got into a very good routine of getting up and goes to work with no fuss. He tells me he is working towards his Health and Safety qualification and has an app on his phone to practice this. My only worry is that he has spent quite a bit of his wages on clothes and things he doesn’t need, so I would like him to learn to save and to budget for things. He says he gets on with the other boys and that they are good boys. He likes his tutor too. I don’t know exactly what it is that has caused such a positive shift in his attitudes, but it is very good.

Ronny said the following: *“I really like work; it really is good fun. I enjoyed painting at RAF Lakenheath. We were just able to get on with the job in hand. The journey was a bit long, but it gave us time to prepare for day ahead. I have all the clothes I needs, get good breaks, and have learnt new skills. Dave demonstrates to me simple but new skills that I now know. I feel respected in work and enjoy the company of the other boys. I like being financially secure to help my mum out. I have saved enough to pay for my provisional driving licence and could quickly save enough to sit my Compulsory Basic Training licence now to get a moped. I have got into such a routine that I often*

wake before my alarm clock! It has all be a very positive experience and I want to remain on Skill Mill and in full time employment”.

5. Feedback from Site Supervisor

The contract and programme of work provided by Equans presents daily challenges that make for an 'excellent classroom' giving the boys invaluable life skills in a controlled environment.

The management team on base were very welcoming and all were invested in the project, which allowed the team's ability to grow to the point where instead of one properties' fence being painted in two days - four properties fences were being painted in one day.

The better they got at the job their confidence in all aspects of their life improved, they have found purpose and structure in their day-to-day life and seem settled in the routine with a new set of priorities, looking past day to day and making plans for their futures.”

6. Feedback from Equans' Procurement Manager

The site supervisor endorsed the Equans approach stating:

The Skill Mill has carried out excellent work painting domestic property fences here at RAF Lakenheath. The team has delivered this service to a high standard in a professional manner. The quality of their work has been to a very high standard with excellent feedback given to us by both the residents and the client.

Communication between The Skill Mill and ourselves has been great and they are keen and eager to complete the work, whilst maintaining those excellent standards throughout. The team are always courteous and respectful and always eager to deliver a quality service. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Skill Mill and watching these young people develop.

7. Summary

Equans is a UK-based provider of technical, FM, regeneration, and energy services with a commitment to responsible business practices. One of their recent projects involved providing external site maintenance services for the government, and as a socially responsible company, Equans sought a supplier that could deliver high-quality services while aligning with their values.

The company evaluated various factors, including credibility, expertise, and social responsibility practices before selecting The Skill Mill, a multi-award-winning social enterprise that provides employment opportunities for young people aged between sixteen and eighteen.

Established in 2013, The Skill Mill employs only ex-offenders, actively reducing reoffending while increasing engagement, participation, employability, and educational levels of the young people to increase their life chances. In the past nine years, The Skill Mill has employed 348 young people in the UK, and only 27 of those have been re-convicted, meaning their re-conviction rate is just 7.7%,

Equans and The Skill Mill collaborated on a site maintenance project, which had a transformative effect on the young people involved. The work experiences impacted and changed the lives of these young people positively, and the impact of work on individuals went beyond financial gain. The transformative effect on personal growth and development was evident in the inspiring stories of young people who were once offenders and were given a chance by The Skill Mill to work on the Norfolk site.

Working with The Skill Mill has positively impacted the lives of young offenders, providing them with an opportunity to turn their lives around. For example, Danny, who struggled with unstructured spare time and emotions, said that working with The Skill Mill helped him turn his life around. He enjoys working with the team and earning his own wage. Eddie, who had several offences, said that working with The Skill Mill helped him learn new skills, and he is grateful for the opportunity. Their work experience has helped them to develop their personal and professional skills and has provided them with a path towards positive change and rehabilitation.

By partnering with a social enterprise, Equans have demonstrated its commitment to creating a positive social impact, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace while delivering quality services to the government. The project was a success, and the company received positive feedback from both the government and the supplier. This partnership has paved the way for Equans to work more with social enterprises and contribute to a sustainable and inclusive economy.







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