

Training the next generation: Securing the future of refrigeration with Arcus FM

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The cooling sector plays an essential role in industries like food retail and hospitality, ensuring supply chains and customer environments remain efficient and safe. However, our industry faces a significant skills gap that impacts our ability to grow, innovate, and meet sustainability demands. The shortage of skilled technicians has increased competition for talent and made transitioning to environmentally friendly refrigerants more difficult, which is crucial for reaching the UK's climate goals.

At Arcus, we see this challenge as an opportunity to innovate and lead the sector. Our traineeship programme for Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) engineers to become fully-skilled refrigeration engineers is our way of addressing this gap head-on and future-proofing the refrigeration sector in the UK.

THE CURRENT SKILLS CRISIS IN THE COOLING SECTOR

The skills gap in the UK's refrigeration and cooling sector is well-documented. The industry has struggled to find skilled technicians, causing escalating costs that impact both providers and end-users. An Institute of Refrigeration report stated that over 60% of companies find it challenging to fill specialist roles, resulting in increased operational costs and delayed projects.

Adapting to environmental legislation has compounded this further. The UK's adherence to European F-Gas regulations requires reducing hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) gases. The shift to alternative refrigerants, such as CO₂ and hydrocarbons, demands new skills that many traditional engineers may lack. The shortage of qualified professionals affects our ability to make environmentally responsible changes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This skills gap is not only a workforce issue; it's a customer issue too. Customers—whether in retail, hospitality, or logistics – depend on us to provide a consistent service that ensures operational up-time on vital assets, as well as innovation in energy efficiency and sustainability. Capacity issues can put that at risk.

THE ARCUS FM TRAINEESHIP PROGRAMME

To address this skills crisis, Arcus launched our refrigeration traineeship programme in 2022. This initiative was created for our M&E engineers with a Level 2 electrical qualification wanting to progress into refrigeration engineering. We leveraged workforce expertise to provide additional training and meet customer needs.

The traineeship spans 12 months, during which trainees receive hands-on and classroom-based training. They are mentored by experienced engineers, attend monthly technical workshops, and receive instruction in refrigeration fundamentals, F-Gas certification, CO2 systems, and hydrocarbons. The training is supported by our National Training Centre, launched in 2023, serving as a hub for learning, development, and cross-skilling for all engineers.

The traineeship offers ongoing mentoring, enabling trainees to learn from experienced engineers who understand our customers' systems. The personal growth element – from gaining confidence in diagnosing issues to building customer relationships – is critical to ensuring service longevity.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR OUR CUSTOMERS

Our traineeship programme is about service reliability. By developing engineers in-house, we create a sustainable workforce that can grow with our customers' needs. This means fewer disruptions, quicker response times, and better service for our customers.

Having skilled engineers familiar with your systems is crucial for operational efficiency. It allows us to reduce downtime, optimise energy usage, and address issues faster. Our emphasis on training in new technologies, such as CO2 and hydrocarbons, ensures we can help our customers make environmentally conscious choices without compromising performance.

The benefits extend beyond day-to-day operations. For customers focused on sustainability goals, partnering with an organisation that trains its workforce in the latest green technologies offers a clear advantage. By investing in training for refrigerants that align with F-Gas regulations, we help our customers meet compliance requirements while reducing environmental impact.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT

What makes our traineeship programme stand out is its emphasis on internal development. We are not just simply recruiting externally to fill these critical roles – we are nurturing the talent already within Arcus. This brings stability, consistency, and dedication to our teams, which is reflected in the high quality of service our customers receive.

The success of the programme would not be possible without our mentors, who are the backbone of our development strategy. They are instrumental in guiding the next generation of refrigeration engineers, sharing their knowledge and experience to ensure that trainees understand both the technical and

customer service aspects of their role.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF REFRIGERATION

The cooling sector is rapidly evolving, and at Arcus, we aim to play a key role in shaping its future.

We believe that the way forward is clear: invest in people, invest in skills, and always look for the opportunity to innovate in the face of challenge. Our commitment to development -whether in technology, training, or customer experience - is what defines us. The skills gap is real, and we're looking to bridge it, one engineer at a time.