



Navigating the Waters:

# Overcoming Recruitment Challenges in the Water Industry





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# NAVIGATING THE WATERS: OVERCOMING RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES IN THE WATER INDUSTRY

In the rapidly evolving utilities landscape, a company's reputation is paramount, impacting its relationships with customers, regulators, investors, employees, and the broader community.

Recent events, however, have cast shadows over several UK water companies, raising questions about their credibility and operations.

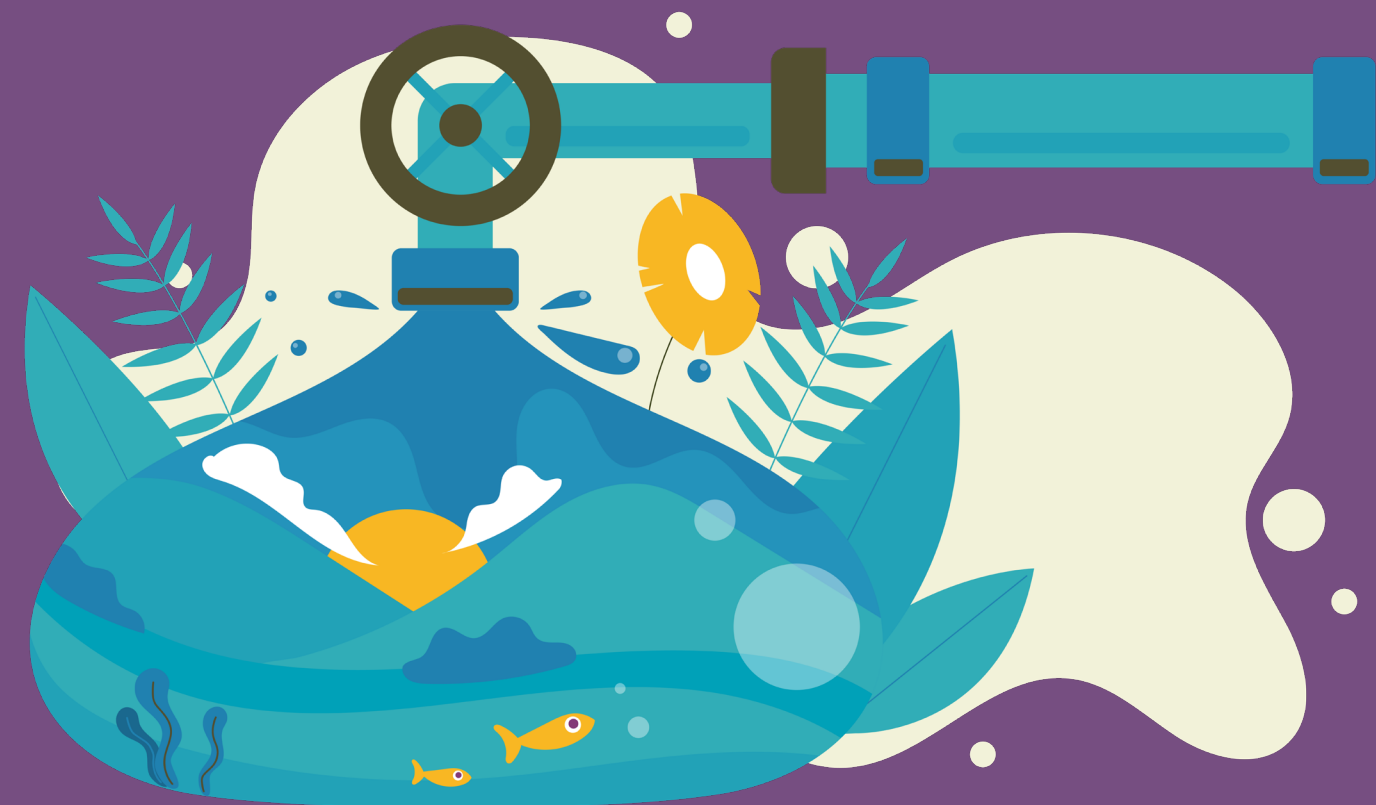
This negative spotlight not only affects consumer trust but also poses significant recruitment challenges in an industry already facing a talent shortage. With over 20% of its experienced professionals set to retire in the next decade, the water industry needs a strategic approach to talent acquisition and retention.

In this white paper, we will first delve into the challenges the water industry currently faces in terms of recruitment and brand image, shedding light on the root causes and their repercussions.

But rest assured, it's not all doom and gloom.

Following the challenges section, we will present a range of tangible solutions, strategies, and initiatives that can counter these concerns, offering a comprehensive roadmap to revitalise the sector.

By presenting both challenges and solutions, we aim to provide an in-depth understanding of the current state of the water industry and to highlight the proactive measures that can be taken to steer towards a more sustainable and tech-forward future.



### **Food for thought:**

*How is your organisation preparing for the impending talent shortage in the water industry?*

# FACING THE RECRUITMENT HURDLE

The effect of negative media coverage has been found to be three times larger than positive news and can have far-reaching implications from:



## Erosion of Competitive Advantage

**Impact:** Much effort has gone into changing the water industry’s image to appeal to a wider range of talent and to attract a younger, more digital-savvy workforce. Moreover, prospective employees, especially those in the younger generation, are increasingly conscious of the ethical practices of their potential employers and want to work for reputable companies that align with their values. However, when a company faces negative media, its public image is tarnished. Prospective employees may perceive other organisations, which haven’t suffered such negative press, as more attractive. This erodes the unique appeal the company might have had in the job market.

**Consequence:** Scandals can create an atmosphere of distrust and in a sector as competitive as water, where workers under the age of 24 account for just 8% of the workforce, a damaged reputation can deter top-tier talent from considering a career in the water industry, giving competitors an edge in attracting the best talent. This can lead to a potential decline in innovation, productivity, and overall business performance.

**Solution:** Actively promote positive achievements and foster an inclusive company culture to counteract negative media and maintain a strong employer brand that attracts young, tech-savvy talent.

“ Actively promote positive achievements and foster an inclusive company culture.

## Setbacks in Diversity Initiatives

**Impact:** Negative press could even limit the diversity of talent applying to the water industry at a time when diversifying their workforce has been hot on water companies’ agendas. Talented individuals from various backgrounds and with different skills might be discouraged from joining, given the perceived challenges or controversies. Additionally, if negative coverage revolves around issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) this can seriously hinder a company’s efforts in promoting EDI.

**Consequence:** An organisation might become less appealing to a broader spectrum of candidates, leading to a potential setback in overall business performance as greater diversity is linked to higher financial performance, innovation and customer satisfaction. In the water sector this issue is accentuated by the continued under-representation of women, where according to the Women in Water Utilities: Breaking Down Barriers report only 1 in 5 utility employees are female.

**Solution:** Reinforce a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion through transparent communication and tangible initiatives to reassure potential candidates of your company’s dedication to a diverse workplace.

## Generalisations and Misconceptions

**Impact:** Often, negative press can lead to broad generalisations about an industry. Media, by its nature, can sometimes simplify or sensationalise issues. This can lead to generalised views about a company based on limited information or misconceptions stemming from distorted reporting.

**Consequence:** Potential employees might make decisions based on these generalisations or misconceptions, even if they aren’t entirely accurate or reflective of the company’s true culture or values, similar to past inaccuracies seen in media coverage. Candidates might believe, for instance, that the entire water sector is fraught with issues, even if the negative news has been about specific companies or a localised event. They might even ponder over the long-term reputation and stability of joining an industry seemingly battling internal issues when browsing headlines about legal struggles.

**Solution:** Engage in proactive media outreach and educational campaigns to correct misconceptions and highlight your company’s true culture and values, differentiating it from negative industry stereotypes.



**Food for thought:**  
How has negative media coverage impacted your company's recruitment efforts and overall brand image?



### Increased Hiring Cost

**Impact:** A tarnished reputation may necessitate increased spending on employer branding, public relations campaigns, or even higher salary offers to lure sceptical candidates.

**Consequence:** A company might find its recruitment budget ballooning, with a potential decrease in the quality of its hires.

**Solution:** Invest in robust employer branding and employee advocacy programs that leverage the voices of satisfied employees to attract candidates, potentially reducing the need for expensive hiring incentives.



### Long-term Brand Damage

**Impact:** Repeated or particularly egregious negative media exposure can embed a long-lasting negative perception in the minds of the public and potential employees.

**Consequence:** This can hinder recruitment efforts for years, even if the company makes genuine efforts to change. The lingering stigma can be challenging to shake off, and in particular when legal culpability is established by a court of law, requiring significant time and resources.

**Solution:** Implement a long-term strategic PR and branding campaign focused on community engagement and transparency to rebuild trust and gradually alter public perception.



### Talent Drain

**Impact:** Negative press doesn't just affect potential hires. Existing employees, upon seeing or hearing negative coverage, might question their association with a company facing allegations and consider moving to competitors or other sectors.

**Consequence:** The company risks losing institutional knowledge, expertise, and continuity in operations, leading to potential disruptions and the cost of replacing these employees in an industry already grappling with the challenge that 50% of its workforce will be eligible to retire in the next 20 years.

**Solution:** Foster a supportive internal environment with open communication channels to address employee concerns and demonstrate your company's commitment to improvement, thus retaining valuable talent.



Foster a supportive internal environment with open communication channels to address employee concerns.

# HARNESSING THE STRENGTH OF EMPLOYER BRANDING

Negative media coverage has far-reaching implications. For water companies, it underscores the importance of ethical conduct, transparency, and proactive crisis management to protect and uphold their reputations in the face of potential media scrutiny. But it's not as bleak as it seems. Employer branding can be the antidote to the adverse effects of negative press. It's not just about recruitment; it's about reshaping the industry's image in the eyes of both potential and current employees following the recent spate of negative press.

As Lindsay Harrison, CCO at Rullion said: "Resilient companies face challenges and adapt. With the right team and approach, they can use these challenges as opportunities for growth."

A strong employer brand can:



## Attract top talent

In the face of adversity, a strong employer brand can still draw top-tier talent by showcasing company culture, professional growth avenues, and a commitment to ethical conduct.



## Ensure loyalty among existing employees

A well-cultivated brand ensures existing employees remain ambassadors, defending and upholding company values even in turbulent times.



## Control the narrative in the face of adverse media attention

Allows water companies to share their story, values, and vision, rather than having news stories steer the narrative.



**Food for thought:**  
Is your company leveraging the power of employer branding to counteract negative press? If not, what's holding you back?



"...It's not just about recruitment; it's about reshaping the industry's image in the eyes of both potential and current employees..."

# 10 STRATEGIES TO BOOST EMPLOYER BRANDING IN THE WATER SECTOR



## Narrative Control

Take charge of the narrative surrounding their company. Craft stories that highlight their mission, vision, and values, especially those that resonate with the ethos of the water sector.

**How?** Use platforms like company blogs, press releases, and media engagements to communicate their company's successes, innovations, and impact in the water sector.



## Prioritise Transparency

Emphasise open communication about both their successes and challenges.

**How?** Regularly update stakeholders on company operations, financial status, and projects. This can be achieved through annual reports, quarterly updates, or dedicated transparency portals.



## Feedback Channels

Encourage both internal and external feedback to continuously improve.

**How?** Set up mechanisms like suggestion boxes, online feedback forms, and town-hall meetings where employees and stakeholders can voice concerns and offer suggestions.



## Regular Audits

Conduct routine evaluations of company practices to ensure they align with industry standards and best practices.

**How?** Implement third-party audits to review and validate company processes, ensuring adherence to regulations and industry benchmarks.



## Highlight Sustainability

Given the environmental focus of the water sector, it's vital to promote and showcase sustainability initiatives.

**How?** Invest in sustainable technologies, promote water conservation initiatives, and regularly report on your carbon footprint and other sustainability metrics.



## Promote Continuous Learning

Encourage employees to continuously upskill and stay updated with the latest industry trends.

**How?** Offer in-house training, sponsor employees for workshops and courses, and create a culture that values continuous personal and professional growth.

By implementing and promoting these 10 strategies, water sector companies can strengthen their employer branding, making them more appealing to potential employees and stakeholders.



## Community Engagement

Engage with local communities to build trust and showcase their commitment to positive impact.

**How?** Organise community events, workshops, and initiatives that aim to educate and empower the community about water resources and conservation.



## Employee Testimonials

Showcase the experiences of employees to provide a genuine insight into the company culture and values.

**How?** Use video interviews, written testimonials, or features in newsletters to share employee stories, experiences, and achievements.



## Educational Partnerships

Collaborate with educational institutions to promote knowledge exchange and foster the next generation of water sector professionals.

**How?** Set up internships, scholarships, or collaborative research projects with universities and technical institutes.



## Leverage Social Media

Utilise social media platforms to connect with a wider audience and showcase their company's initiatives and achievements.

**How?** Regularly post updates, behind-the-scenes content, and engaging multimedia content on platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram.



**Food for thought:**  
*Which of these strategies is your company already implementing, and which ones present new opportunities?*

# REVITALISING WATER COMPANIES: THE ROLE OF RECRUITMENT AGENCIES IN REBUILDING TRUST



Water companies, over the years, have faced increasing scrutiny regarding their service quality, environmental impact, and transparency in operations.

As these sectors look to rebuild trust and rejuvenate their image, recruitment agencies are emerging as significant allies in this transformative journey.

Their role goes beyond merely filling vacancies; they are strategic partners that can have a central part to play by providing a holistic approach to improving a company's image from the inside out.

Below are seven ways how:

## Talent Acquisition and Management

The backbone of any company's success is its workforce. Recruitment agencies possess an in-depth understanding of the water industry, which enables them to identify and attract individuals with the right skill set, attitude, and passion for driving change. With their vast networks and data-driven processes, they can pinpoint candidates who are not only technically sound but also align with a company's mission and values.

## Cultivating a Positive Organisational Culture

A company's culture has a direct bearing on employee satisfaction, customer perception, and overall success. Recruitment agencies assist in instilling values of transparency, responsibility, and environmental stewardship among employees. They also foster team dynamics that promote innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to excellence.

## Employer Branding Initiatives

The external perception of a water company can heavily influence its success in attracting top talent. Recruitment agencies can aid in crafting an appealing employer brand by highlighting a company's commitment to sustainability, employee growth, and community engagement. Through targeted campaigns, they can present the company as an ideal workplace, drawing in motivated professionals who can propel the company forward.



*Resilient companies face challenges and adapt. With the right team and approach, they can use these challenges as opportunities for growth.*

## Reputation Management

In the age of digital communication, maintaining a positive reputation is paramount. Recruitment agencies, equipped with specialists in communication and PR, can help water companies navigate negative press, engage in proactive community dialogues, and showcase positive milestones.

## Training and Development

The water sector is rapidly evolving, with emerging technologies and regulatory changes shaping its future. Recruitment agencies can identify skill gaps and facilitate training sessions that keep the workforce updated and ahead of the curve.

## Collaborative Initiatives

Specialist agencies often collaborate with industry thought leaders, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. These alliances can pave the way for knowledge-sharing seminars, joint research initiatives, and community outreach programs, further solidifying a water company's role as an industry leader and trusted entity.

## Content Creation

To effectively communicate with the public, water companies require engaging content that educates and informs. Specialist recruitment agencies, with their finger on the water industry's pulse, can produce content that resonates, be it whitepapers on water conservation techniques or social media campaigns on community initiatives.



**Food for thought:** How are recruitment agencies aiding your company in not just filling roles but also in enhancing its public image?

“Recruitment and consultancy agencies, such as ours, have a crucial role to play in reshaping the narrative around water companies,” said Lindsay, commenting on the role agencies must play in offering comprehensive solutions to enhance water companies’ public perception.

“Beyond just talent acquisition, we serve as strategic partners, focusing on holistic approaches that uplift both the internal culture and external reputation of these entities.

“As the industry continues to face increasing scrutiny, our objective is to help water companies highlight their commitment to innovation, sustainability, and the greater good. When done right, we can significantly alter public perception, placing these companies in a positive light and underscoring their vital contributions to society.”

## THE UK WATER INDUSTRY: A NEXUS OF INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

The UK water industry is undergoing a significant transformation.

“The water sector is a hotbed of opportunity,” said Lindsay.

With a rich heritage, cutting-edge technology, and a commitment to net zero goals, the water sector is shaping the future, she said.

Once seen as a traditional and conservative sector, the industry has evolved dramatically in recent years, Lindsay added.

“With ever-increasing global challenges, such as climate change and urbanisation, the industry’s shift towards innovation and sustainability is not just commendable but also imperative.”



**Food for thought:**  
In what ways is your organisation contribution to the UK water industry’s transformation towards sustainability and innovation?



# TOP 5 REASONS TO CONSIDER THE UK WATER INDUSTRY:

## Championing Net Zero and Sustainability

*Environmental commitment:* It's at the forefront of the global fight against climate change. Many water companies have committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions, aligning with the UK's broader goal to be net zero by 2050.

*Innovative solutions:* To achieve this, the industry has adopted solutions such as harnessing renewable energy, implementing water-saving technologies, and reducing waste in operations.

*Protection of natural resources:* Beyond carbon reduction, the industry is actively working to safeguard water sources, ensuring that future generations have access to clean and safe drinking water.

## Embracing Cutting-Edge Technologies

*Smart water management:* Utilises advanced technologies, such as AI and IoT, to optimise water distribution, reduce leakage, and predict maintenance needs.

*Waste-to-energy initiatives:* By converting wastewater and sludge into energy, water companies not only manage waste but also generate sustainable power.

*Research & development:* Continuous R&D efforts ensure that the UK water sector remains adaptive and forward-thinking, ready to tackle new challenges that arise.

## Valuing Diversity and Fresh Ideas

*Inclusive workforce:* The UK water industry recognises the importance of a diverse workforce. By fostering inclusivity, companies are benefiting from varied perspectives and innovative ideas.

*Collaborative approach:* The sector frequently collaborates with universities, tech startups, and research institutions, ensuring a constant influx of fresh ideas and solutions.

*Empowerment initiatives:* Many companies have programs in place to nurture and promote young talent, ensuring that the industry's future remains bright.

## Making a Global Difference

*Sharing expertise:* Given its advanced technological and sustainable practices, the water industry often collaborates with international partners to share expertise and implement best practices globally.

*Humanitarian efforts:* Many UK water companies are involved in projects worldwide to provide clean drinking water and sanitation facilities to underserved communities.

*Influencing global policies:* The industry's commitment to sustainability and innovation has positioned it as a thought leader, influencing water management policies on an international scale.

## Continuous Learning and Growth

*Ongoing training:* The ever-evolving nature of the industry means that continuous training and upskilling are paramount. Employees often have access to workshops, courses, and conferences.

*Investment in research:* The industry's significant investment in research ensures that it remains at the cutting edge of technological advancements.

*Career progression:* With a vast array of roles ranging from engineering to environmental science, employees in the UK water industry enjoy diverse career paths and opportunities for growth.

The UK water industry is more than just a sector; it's a movement towards a sustainable, tech-centric future.

"The water sector is a powerhouse of change," concluded Lindsay.

At Rullion, we understand the unique challenges and opportunities in the water industry. Our expertise and strategic approach position us as trusted partners for water companies looking to navigate the complexities of recruitment and employer branding. Reach out to us, and together, let's chart a course towards a sustainable, tech-forward future in the water industry.



**Food for thought:**  
How is your company  
championing these five pillars  
of the UK water industry?

# YOU POWER THE WORLD. WE HELP YOU BUILD IT.

## Creating workforce solutions for critical infrastructure companies.

We're one of the UK's largest workforce solutions providers in critical infrastructure. From training new talent to managing outsourced recruitment processes like Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) or Managed Service Programmes (MSP), every solution is grounded in people-first values and a strong commitment to inclusion.

For us it's about more than just delivering a service; it's about building lasting partnerships that help you get work done and build diverse, future-ready teams.

## Four ways we help you get work done:

| FIND                  | DEVELOP         | DELIVER           | PROCESS              |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| RPO on Demand         | Train to Deploy | Statement of Work | MSP                  |
| Executive Search      | Early Careers   | Project Delivery  | RPO                  |
| Embedded Resource     |                 |                   | Total Talent         |
| Permanent Recruitment |                 |                   | Services Procurement |
| Temporary Recruitment |                 |                   | Background Screening |



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