



# The right connection?



**Brian Popplestone, MD of Fulcrum, talks about energy with a passion and questions why some things in life that should be easy can be made overly complex**

“**W**hen a new property is built, be it domestic, industrial, commercial or retail you would think that getting the gas connected would be one of the simpler parts of the project yet in a recent poll 86 per cent of building companies said that they have continual problems trying to get utility services laid on time,” begins Brian.

Fulcrum, a wholly owned subsidiary of National Grid, is now offering its services directly to this market and hopes to provide the solution to an obvious market need. Brian explains that there are a number of prerequisites to operate in the gas connections market: “Primarily a company needs to be GIRS (Gas Industry Registration Scheme) accredited; Fulcrum is accredited in five categories under the scheme, making it the most qualified company in the UK gas connection industry. However,

the real credential is to properly understand what the client really needs and be capable of delivering it.”

Fulcrum was originally set up as the sole provider of connection services to the national regulated gas networks. On 1st June 2005, National Grid sold four of its regional gas networks for approximately £6 billion. Brian enthuses about the opportunities that have opened up: “Until the networks’ sale Fulcrum had always acted as an agent for the gas networks and had to operate under regulatory restrictions. The sale gave us the opportunity to expand and work directly with the customers who needed gas connections. This enabled us to place these customers at the heart of what we developed. We still operate across the whole of mainland UK but now offer true end-to-end services: from design through to installation of inlet pipework, fitting of meters and installation of outlet pipework to

customers' appliances. We also offer gas disconnections, consultancy and project management services as well as a separate audit function."

Fulcrum is structured with centralised back office systems in Rotherham, design houses in Edinburgh and Crawley and a geographically distributed engineering workforce. Brian continues: "This means that we are able to offer companies a professional design service with the consistency of centralised back office processes coupled with local professional engineers wherever the project is on mainland UK. A job in Truro will be carried out in exactly the same professional manner as a job in Dundee, the same engineering standards, the same notification, the same management information and the same administrative processes. Consistency, consistency, consistency."

"What companies require of us is fairly simple to understand, to deliver what we say we will when we said we would.....and keep them informed. Communication is critical to any relationship. In fact, each of our larger clients has a dedicated manager whom they can contact and who will remain in



contact with them throughout the project to ensure that everything is running smoothly."

The market move from a regulated to non-regulated environment was a major change for Fulcrum and, from the company's point of view, meant quite a large transition from being a business that focused on one client to one that is now focused on multiple clients. Brian is determined to ensure the marketplace understands Fulcrum's new market ►

## Looking for a new challenge?

**Develop is one of the UK's fastest growing training companies, specialising in technical skills training.**

We already employ over 150 people and have several outstanding training centres across the UK. Develop is the preferred training supplier to the Utilities sector, working with a large number of blue chip companies.

Due to the rapid growth of our business, we are seeking to employ staff in a range of training and managerial positions. Experience is preferred but not essential, in one of the following sectors;

- Gas
- Electrical & Mechanical
- Rail
- Water
- Environment
- Construction

Excellent packages are available for the right people.

Talk to us on **0800 876 6708** or email [enquiries@develop-solutions.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@develop-solutions.co.uk)

**one brand multiple solutions**

**DEVELOP**

[www.develop-solutions.co.uk](http://www.develop-solutions.co.uk)





position: "Today we deal with 50 reasonably sized contracts as well as many individual one-off contracts direct with consumers and that has required considerable change on a number of fronts, one being that it calls for a different type of mindset from employees. When we were working in a regulated environment there was only a single product offered, whereas in a commercial environment there's a far greater product range.

"Each job is fairly bespoke so it's not a matter of just offering a vanilla service but instead walking each job through with the client to ensure every one of their requirements is met and then ensuring that they are kept informed where relevant as the job progresses. From the employees' point of view, this has released some of the shackles associated with operating one product for one client. So, whilst our employees have had to adapt, the new business allows greater job satisfaction."

Brian continues: "Do I think we're unique? Probably, we work in all sectors of the market so we

will be able to work with clients who have a portfolio of different types of property whilst also being able to service one off properties. It's the fact that we not only carry out large installations for the likes of local authorities, hospitals, universities or multi-national companies, but also small commercial jobs for local businesses like your fish and chip shop and that mix places us in a rather unique position.

"From an engineering perspective, we can help our customers define their requirements through load analysis and site visits. Because we have professional engineers across the whole of mainland UK we can quickly carry out on-site surveys with customers to discuss and agree the best ways of routing pipes to ►



**“FROM AN ENGINEERING PERSPECTIVE, WE CAN HELP OUR CUSTOMERS DEFINE THEIR REQUIREMENTS THROUGH LOAD ANALYSIS AND SITE VISITS.”**

ensure that costs are minimised for the total project in that they will not incur large costs when it comes to running the outlet pipework. There is a generalised assumption in the market that the customer is an informed purchaser. With such a fragmented market this isn't always the case, so by offering a complete product line, we've taken away that need for the customer to be an absolute expert."

The year 2006 proved to be a very successful year



## T-MOBILE

T-Mobile is helping Fulcrum's workforce work smarter, with their fast, affordable mobile broadband. Using the datacard in their laptops they can now access their office applications while they're on the move keeping in touch with their teams and customers. "T-Mobile's unlimited data price plan is also helping them control costs," says Richard Millen, business development manager T-Mobile.

## NORWICH UNION OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Norwich Union Occupational Health is proud to partner the leading members of the utilities industry in the delivery of occupational health services.

Our extensive range of medical services help our clients manage their risks and reduce the impact and cost of absence.

Our services include: recording of absence, management referrals, health surveillance, mobile health screening, HAVS, case management, EAP and vaccination programmes.

for Fulcrum, as Brian comments: "I believe that's because it was a year of transition and building; the market is now beginning to respond. Our business is transforming both in terms of the products and services we offer and to whom we offer them but, more importantly in the way we deliver them."

Looking to the future Brian explains: "At present we are considering a multi utility product to encompass gas, electricity, water and telecoms but only when we know we can deliver the service professionally will we offer it to the market."

He concludes: "I am confident that we'll be able to deliver a professional service to large and small developments alike ensuring that our clients' projects are successful." ●

**The blackspots in your business are not as easy to see**

Every business has health blackspots which could cost money in lost productivity, staff cover, or even prosecution. And with increasing legislation and rising absence costs – it's more vital than ever that you stay one step ahead.

Norwich Union's Occupational Health services can help you to identify the blackspots in your business by tailoring a programme of services to suit your needs. From mobile screening to absence management tools, wellness and medical case management, we can map out a plan that works for you, saving you getting caught out when you least expect it.

Call Norwich Union's Occupational Health services on 0800 015 0822 and quote reference OAX DPP.  
[www.nuoccupationalhealth.com](http://www.nuoccupationalhealth.com)

**NORWICH UNION**  
an aviva company

Occupational Health is provided by Norwich Union Occupational Health Limited. Registered in England Number 5554497. Registered Office 8 Sunny Street, Norwich NR1 3JG. Norwich Union Occupational Health Limited acts as an Introducer. Appointed Representative to Norwich Union Healthcare Limited which is Authorized and Regulated by the Financial Services Authority. Corporate Health Services, Bredon House, 321 Tottenhall Road, Wolverhampton WV6 0EZ. LNH1201 03\_07

[t-mobile.co.uk/business](http://t-mobile.co.uk/business) Subject to standard terms contract. Credit check applies.

**WE HAVE A PLAN FOR YOUR BUSINESS** → **NOT JUST ANY BUSINESS**

Tell us what you need and we'll offer you a plan tailored to your business.

Call us on 0800 587 0097

**Business** **T-Mobile**  
stays closer