

Celebrating World Plumbing Day 2021

It is World Plumbing Day 2021 today and The Scotland and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation ask us to remind readers of the important link between quality plumbing and health.

The federation says the last year has demonstrated the vital contribution of plumbing to clean water and sanitation systems so vital for good health.

Engineers and plumbing professionals have donned PPE and kept the water running and heating on.



Here Michael Cairns, Managing Director, [Celsius Plumbing and Heating](#), Edinburgh answers some questions.

How many employees?

17, including two apprentices, the second of whom qualified just last month.

How long have you been a plumber and how did you get started?

I began serving my time in 2003, and unfortunately qualified just as the financial crisis hit in 2007/8. I was made redundant, so really circumstances dictated that I should have a go at starting my own business. I took on my brother as an apprentice and he now trains people himself and brings them on.

There was, of course, a lot of uncertainty in the economy when we started out – rather similar to the way things are now. But in many other ways, they were different days. The technology for self-employed people was much less developed, and we had to learn everything about business by ourselves.

What is your favourite part of the job?

I'm not really on the tools these days, but still muck in as and when needed, which I really enjoy. Our company Value 'willing to sweep floors' means no matter your position in the company, everyone is willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. I have worked really hard over the past four or five years to build a business that can run without me being continually involved in it. I want to work on the business, rather than in the business. So, I have invested heavily in putting systems and processes in place which, for a trade-based business, is quite unusual. I did not want Celsius to be

over-reliant on me. What I enjoy most about the job at the moment is dealing with internal processes, how we automate and how we employ technology.

What is the greatest challenge in your job?

Very early on in the pandemic, we recognised that although people's confidence was low, we still had to have access to their homes and workplaces. But we were only carrying out essential work and anything non-essential had to be placed in a backlog of work. This was quite difficult, since we are a reactive company – work comes in, we get it done and we invoice. Once we came out of the first lockdown, we were very busy clearing the backlog and once we emerge from this one, we will use the lessons we have learned to catch up with the work we have had to postpone.

How has the pandemic changed your day-to-day?

Safety has always been an over-riding priority, but the last year has placed an emphasis on making sure that our customers, as well as our team, feels safe. Early last year, we created a Covid Response Video which is communicated to our customers when our engineers are on the way to them so that they know what to expect. We have to go into a lot of elderly people's homes and it is vital that they feel safe and confident in us. I am super-proud of the team – you just have to look at our reviews.

Have you implemented any changes during the pandemic that you will continue after?

We knew that cashflow was going to take a hit because we could only do essential work. One solution we have implemented, and it has been really successful, is that we now take payment in advance for work. It is not normal in the trade. It shows a remarkable degree of trust from our customers, who have been very supportive of our situation. We will continue to do this after Covid.

Have you done anything to help during this difficult time?

As key workers, we have managed to keep most of the team in full-time employment, but when people were furloughed we felt it was really important to keep in touch with them to make sure that they were coping. Tradespeople are naturally busy, and suddenly, overnight, they were confined to the house and not doing anything.

We wanted to let them know that they were not forgotten about and, as well as Zoom meetings, we instituted a Friday check-in. We all know that mental health in isolation has been a major issue over the past year and the feedback from the team has said that our efforts have been very helpful.

International Women's Day has just passed. How are you helping females into the sector?

Women are valued members of the team. They are an integral part of our organisation, and we couldn't do without them. We have three with us at the moment: Monique is an engineer, who specialises in water and Legionella testing and certification; Ailsa, who is a senior maintenance co-ordinator; and Ailie, who started as an apprentice junior administrator and is now a maintenance co-ordinator. We have a blog on our website about their contribution.

What advice do you have to people starting out or thinking about becoming a plumber?

For a small business, we try to do our bit for apprentices. We have helped 10 youngsters in the 14 years we have been going, and we will continue to be ambassadors for apprenticeships.

Obviously, we cannot take on every applicant, but when young people approach us, we always get in touch with them and offer advice about what they could be doing to find an employer. We are going to have an apprentice page on our website, to which we can direct people, and other people in the industry can

send applicants to it.

We would advise would-be apprentices to establish a LinkedIn page – it's free to use and connects you to people in the industry. They should be aware that four years can seem like a long time, and like hard work, but once they are qualified, they have a skill for life. A qualified plumbing and heating engineer should never be out of work.

What has being a SNIPEF member brought to you?

Credibility, in a word. The team at SNIPEF is always on hand to answer any difficult questions we may have and their support for apprentices is first class. When we were taking people on at first, SNIPEF's advisers were able to guide us in areas such as contracts and employment law. We wish we had joined sooner.