

Training & Recruitment

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TRAIN ON RAIL CONFERENCE



Paul McLoughlin, Andy Meadows, John Seddon, Nick Mitchell, Vicky Bull.

THE rail industry is facing a serious shortage of trained and skilled people – and recruitment has not been helped by a negative image of the industry in the public's mind.

A special one-day 'Train on Rail' conference was held in Derby on 15 July to focus on the industry's future recruitment and training needs. The conference was sponsored by Railnews together with RTC Group plc, which operates ATA Recruitment, Catalis Rail Training and the Derby Conference Centre.

Delegates heard of plans to recruit people with transferable skills from the armed forces into traction and rolling stock maintenance

roles in train companies, and of a pilot project with The Prince's Trust to get disadvantaged young people out of the jobs queue and into work with Network Rail, train operators and industry suppliers.

The conference also heard from Go Skills, the passenger transport sector's Skills Council, which explained the government help available for companies to raise skills and improve their employees' social inclusion.

Speakers from across the industry took to the platform to spell out their views on the future of the railways – and why it is now vital to recruit and train tomorrow's workforce.

Recruit, train and retain to

Rail is an industry 'people hungry' in every way

PROSPECTS for the railway industry "have probably never been better, despite the economic doom and gloom in national media headlines", said Sir William McAlpine, opening the 'Train on Rail' conference.

Sir William, who is chairman of Railnews Ltd, as well as chairman of the Railway Heritage Trust – and former boss of civil engineering giant Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd – said the conference was important and firmly focused on what should be "a glorious future" for the rail industry.

"Passenger numbers have grown enormously in the last decade," he said. "There haven't been so many people travelling by train for over 50 years – and then the network was 50 per cent larger than it is today, a fact that reminds us of another of the industry's greatest concerns today: capacity, and the need to increase it.

"Yet demand is continuing to grow," Sir William added, "and the economic situation is, if anything, fuelling that demand in the short-term as people make less use of their cars due to the soaring price of petrol and diesel.

"That, too, is a reminder of one of the other major policy issues that is having a great influence on how the rail industry should develop – the environment, and especially climate change issues."

He said these matters are being drawn together by the RSSB, which is developing The Sustainable Rail Programme – looking at how the railway industry should develop up to the year 2040.

"That is over 30 years ahead of us," said Sir William. "But it is also a reminder that the rail-



Sir William McAlpine,
chairman, Railnews

way industry has a long-term future...a future that needs to be planned for.

"Our railway industry is 'people hungry' in every way. It thrives on carrying large numbers of people – not to mention the freight businesses – and requires large numbers of people to make it function, whether they are 'customer facing' staff on the frontline or essential engineering and maintenance staff behind the scenes.

"That does mean that the industry has a continuing need to recruit, train and retain – and re-train – the right quality and calibre of people."

Sir William said Railnews relied quite significantly on recruitment advertising as a source of revenue. "We wanted to gain a better understanding of what future recruitment needs might be, which led us to talking with RTC Group as one of the industry's major recruiters and trainers – and from this came the decision to organise this conference," he explained.

He added that he hoped it would leave delegates "better informed about what needs to be done to recruit the right sort of people with the right set of skills for an assured future".



In terms of skills needed, the agenda has never been so crowded

IN a keynote speech Andy Meadows, human resources director of National Express East Coast and chairman of ATOC HR Forum, told the conference the rail industry faces significant challenges.

"The global challenge of climate change and the environmental agenda which has evolved massively in a very short space of time has to be high on every agenda and none more so than rail's," he said.

"The national demands in the UK have seen the most significant increases in growth in rail travel over the last 50 years, and resulted in ever-increasing passenger numbers and in customer expectations for higher-quality levels of service and improved punctuality.

"And all this is accompanied by a need to embrace the continuing rapid development of technology that affects all our lives.

"Whilst the current wider economic environment suggests a slow-down in economic growth and, some would say, potentially a recession, some of

the drivers of this current situation – such as higher fuel prices – are making people start, or consider, using public transport, some for the first time.

"Rail's position currently appears to be stronger, therefore, than some other sectors in being able to withstand the implications of such a slow down in growth."

Mr Meadows said that, in terms of skills needed for the rail industry, "the agenda has never been so crowded or so important." It includes:

■ Passenger numbers at their highest level for 50 years "and demand continues to grow and exceed expectations".

■ The Government's recently started dialogue around further electrification and Network Rail's investigation of possible new high-speed lines.

■ National Passenger Surveys showing expectations of customers and how quickly improvements become the norm. But the bar was always being raised – "so the recent completion of the biggest replacement

rolling stock investment programme since dieselisation is now taken for granted."

■ New technology creating huge skill demands, not only in training people entering the industry but ensuring that existing employees' skills are maintained and kept up to date.

■ New trains fitted with new and differing technologies. "Engineering staff have to keep pace with these developments and the complexities of the equipment required to maintain them," said Mr Meadows. "In the foreseeable future, the introduction of ERTMS and huge changes in ticketing technology are upon us with the advancements brought via Internet, mobile phone, barcode scanning and so forth."

Mr Meadows said it was necessary to "make full use of our people", which meant upskilling people in their current roles to meet changing needs and identifying those who have the ability to take on different and wider challenges

"At the same time we must



Andy Meadows
HR director, National Express East Coast and chairman of ATOC HR Forum

ensure rail secures its share from the available new entrant workforce and be ready with the supporting infrastructure and resources to train them effectively and efficiently."

"But the picture that appears to be emerging suggests that the current workforce, together with our share of new entrants leaving full-time education, will not be able to meet our needs, either in terms of quality or quantity.

"We therefore must seek to attract and re-skill adult workers from other sectors and possibly other countries."



drive a sustainable railway

‘Get into Rail’ programme is crucial for the Prince’s Trust target groups

A PROJECT which could go nationwide in the next two years is to be launched in the East Midlands this autumn with The Prince’s Trust, the Prince of Wales’ charity, to recruit and train disadvantaged young people to fill rail industry vacancies.

The pilot ‘Get into Rail’ scheme is due to begin in October and will see young people selected by The Prince’s Trust undergo training and work experience with railway companies – whether Network Rail, train operators, contractors or suppliers.

The aim is that, after the six-week training period, the candidates will have Personal Track Safety Certificates and be found suitable jobs in the rail industry.

The pilot project has been led by one of the East Midlands rail industry’s major employers, Bombardier Transportation, with the aim of rolling out the scheme to other parts of England, Scotland and Wales.

The pilot project is being supported by Railnews, together with Network Rail, London North Eastern, East Midlands Trains, The Signal

Group (Collis Engineering) and British Transport Police.

Other companies that have already shown interest in wider adoption of ‘Get into Rail’ include CrossCountry, Chiltern Railways, First Great Western, First ScotRail, Northern Rail, South West Trains and Virgin Trains.

John Seddon, Bombardier Transportation’s director of strategic procurement, explained: “The Prince’s Trust is the UK’s leading charity for young people, dealing with those aged 14 to 30.

“It especially targets disadvantaged young people, those who are unemployed, educational under-achievers, those in or leaving care, or who have been in trouble with the law.

“The Trust encourages young people to take personal responsibility by providing them with practical, individual support to help them succeed.”

Mr Seddon went on: “Currently, 5.4 per cent of young people leave school with no qualifications, and of the 8,000 who leave care each year, 74 per cent have no qualifications – many are often unable to read or write.

“Around nine per cent of

16 to 25-year-olds have no qualifications at all.

“Nearly 20 per cent leave school with less than five GCSEs at Grade D or below and 287,000 (three per cent) have been convicted of a criminal offence in the last 12 months. Some eight per cent are unemployed.

“This is The Prince’s Trust’s core audience.”

For the rail industry pilot project, Mr Seddon said: “We think we have hit on something quite novel and unique.

“We are developing a programme to deliver an introductory training course, highlighting the employment opportunities in the rail sector.

“Crucially the programme will be aimed at the Trust’s target groups. Even more crucially, we aim to use the programme to promote rail sector opportunities that young people might not be aware of.

“The first ‘Get Into Rail’ course is due to commence in the autumn with a wide range of rail partners involved – the Signal Group, Collis Engineering, Derby Conference Centre/ATA/Catalis Training, East Midlands Trains, Network Rail and Railnews.

passenger industry. “But little funding is flowing in,” she added.

Ms Ball explained that ‘Train to Gain’ had been introduced to raise skills levels and address skills shortages; re-focus training supply so it is demand-led; re-focus funding



John Seddon, director of strategic procurement, Bombardier Transportation

“The course itself will last for six weeks and involve an initial taster day followed by a PTS certificate, Skills for Life support, Manual Handling, COSHH, Basic Fire Awareness and Safe Train Evacuation, and Customer Services and Teamwork modules.

“Work placements will then be delivered by supporting organisations and Derby Conference Centre (accredited training courses). Thereafter, participants will be given help to develop their job search skills and be supported towards employment.

“If ‘Get into Rail’ works in Derby there is the potential to roll it out in other parts of the country. We should know whether this is feasible early in 2009,” said Mr Seddon.

The armed forces have had excellent training – and bring transferable skills

A PLAN to recruit people leaving the armed forces into traction and rolling stock vacancies in the railway industry was unveiled by Paul McLoughlin, head of group sales at RTC Group plc.

Candidates will be trained by Catalis Training at the Derby Conference Centre and placed into train operating company vacancies by ATA Selection. Catalis, the Derby Conference Centre and ATA Selection are all operated by RTC Group.

Outlining the ‘Train into Rail’ project, Mr McLoughlin said people leaving the armed forces had enjoyed excellent training “and often have transferable skills that the railways need”.

The aim was to select suitable people leaving the army, navy or air force and provide them with “industry leading” traction and rolling stock training by Catalis. The candidates would be technically qualified with an electrical, mechanical or electronic bias and qualifi-

cations of NVQ III, apprenticeship trained or higher.

After training at the Derby Conference Centre, ATA Recruitment would undertake face-to-face assessments with candidates and seek to match them with the requirements of train operators.

All candidates would be ‘guaranteed’ for 12 weeks after they begin working with a train operator. If, after that time, a candidate was not considered acceptable, then the employer would get a full refund, said Mr McLoughlin.

Several train companies – including Chiltern Railways, East Midlands Trains, Eurostar, Hitachi and Northern Rail – have already agreed to recruit staff from the ‘Train into Rail’ project.

Paul McLoughlin said RTC Group was looking to expand the concept into other functions, such as ‘Train into Signalling’, ‘Train into Train Driving’, ‘Train into Health and Safety’ and ‘Train into Track Working.’

Training initiatives can attract government funding

THE rail industry needs to raise the profile of its training and qualifications of staff, the Derby conference was told by Nick Mitchell, chairman of GoSkills, the Government’s Sector Skills Council for passenger transport.

Together with Vicky Ball,

GoSkills’ workforce development director, he told the conference about ‘Train to Gain’ – a “government service to help employers get the training advice and support they need”.

Ms Ball said there was “a huge amount” of training being undertaken in the rail

to where it is most needed, and support the twin government policies of social inclusion and raising skills.

She said a range of training initiatives could attract government funding. They include:

- First full Level 2 qualification.

- Skills for life.

- Apprenticeships – 19-25 year olds entitled to free training for first Level 3.

- Some Level 3 qualifications.

- Wage compensation for companies with fewer than 50 employees.

Ms Ball said ‘Train for Gain’

was a government service to help employers get the training advice and support they needed. It included a brokerage service and a training package that could include training subsidies for priority skills and joint investment in training.