

A rail network of opportunities: the women of GTR

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The UK's largest rail franchise is highlighting the roles and opportunities available to women across the rail network alongside the launch of its new recruitment system as part of its ongoing work toward a more diverse workforce.

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), which operates Southern, Gatwick Express, Great Northern and Thameslink services, has implemented the recruitment portal, eArcu, to help streamline the hiring process and help successful applicants into roles faster.

Launching with a number of roles across the operator's four brands, the new site highlights the breadth of positions available across the business, as well as case studies of GTR people working in the roles, offering a direct insight into them.

The eArcu system is more user-friendly and will support more reliable communication with candidates across devices, making the application process smoother and more efficient; once an application is submitted, job seekers will get email notifications on the status of their application.

Zoey Hudson, Head of People Development at GTR, said: "One of the worst things about looking for a job is not hearing back after submitting an application; the new portal structure will keep candidates up to date with the status of their application. The new system allows us to assess at a faster rate, which ultimately means we can invite people in for interviews sooner and fill the roles with the right people quicker than before."

While streamlined, the system asks candidates to explain their motivations for the application; this shift from formal and extensive application questions allows the team to identify those with the right characteristics for the roles available.

Also, when it comes to offering a successful applicant a position, the contract can also be completed in the eArcu portal, helping to speed up the process.

Building on the operator's commitment to improving working practices earlier this year with the creation of its [Women's Network Group](#), the new online recruitment system launches with insights into the careers opportunities available across the organisation.

Rosie-Jayne Wiles, 20, is a third year Apprentice Electrical Engineer from Sandy, Bedfordshire, based at Great Northern's Hornsey train servicing depot. She began her apprenticeship on the railway when she was 17 and had a three-month-old baby. Rosie-Jayne is studying for her Higher National Certificate (HNC) in electrical and electronic engineering. She said: "This is the type of independence the apprenticeship has given me. Everything I wanted to achieve at the end of my apprenticeship is on track to be a reality... I am really proud to inspire other young women into the railway and particularly engineering."

Laura McDonald, 36, originally from Perth in Scotland and now living in South London is a Train Driver based at the Selhurst depot near Croydon. Prior to becoming a Train Driver, Laura had been working as an Accident and Emergency Nurse and had been a Staff Nurse for six years. Although she loved working as a nurse, it was an extremely stressful role. When a friend suggested becoming a driver, Laura went for it. Since qualifying, she has featured in stories across various media platforms to promote train driving to women.

Ramla Abshir-Slevin, 32, is an Apprentice Station Manager based at East Croydon. Former Dental Nurse Ramla came to London in 2008 from Switzerland and at the time didn't speak much English. She started off by cleaning trains at Victoria before joining Southern. She secured the apprentice role earlier this year and says, "For me, my greatest achievement in the railway has been to get where I am now. Not only do I get to do what I love, but I will be rewarded with a qualification at the end of this."

When it comes to progression, the railway is one of the remaining industries that sees employees stick with organisations and helps them rise through the ranks:

Michelle Clark, 41, is Head of Employee Engagement based between GTR's Croydon and Monument offices. Michelle was inspired to work on the railway by her dad, beginning her career as a Support Clerk, then becoming a Station Manager, followed by a move into Human Resources. By 2008, she had become an HR Business Partner and in 2014 was promoted to People Change Lead, before becoming Head of Employee Engagement in February 2017. She says of her journey; "I think I'd avoided the railway as a career choice in the early days because I felt like I should be finding my own way, but the moment I joined the railway I immediately felt like I belonged."

Norma Hewitt, 48, from Stevenage is a Local Development Manager for Operations North based at King's Cross. Commuting to King's Cross is what gave Norma the idea of finding work on the railway. She started her railway career in 1990 at the Battersea ticket office and occupied a variety of positions over the years, including Station Manager roles. Norma then gained experience in Operations and over the years has managed the Control at King's Cross, West Hampstead and Croydon.

Additional case studies are available [here](#).

The operator's commitment to improve diversity is focusing on reviewing and improving workplace practices with a gender lens through its Women's Group Network, which is supported by female and male advocates from divisions across the business.

This work – including an outreach programme with schools – is designed to help GTR achieve greater gender balance across recruitment but also to retain employees in the long term, creating an inclusive workplace that supports all employees.

In March GTR launched the UK's biggest recruitment drive in rail to encourage more young people and women to consider a career in the industry.