

Apprenticeships can benefit your workforce – what next?

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This week marks National Apprenticeship Week, bringing together businesses and apprentices across the country to shine a light on the positive impact that apprenticeships make to individuals, businesses and the wider economy. This year's theme is 'Skills for Life'.

Marking the week Barry Smith, head of assessment and skills at National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR), has written an article for Rail Business Daily about the importance of apprenticeships and how NSAR can help.

"Earlier in February was National Apprenticeship Week. Businesses that employ apprentices across all industries will be looking to use this week as a platform to celebrate their apprentices' success.

There will also be employers that know they could be doing more to make the most of the opportunities that apprenticeships present but have other issues demanding their attention – or are not sure just how to take advantage of these opportunities. At NSAR we can help employers start the process of setting up and delivering their programme.

As an industry, rail needs to start thinking about how we can use apprenticeships to address skills shortages and develop a new generation of talent that plays a key role in building a greener, more productive and better-connected country.

The rail industry is fortunate to have a range of well-funded apprenticeships available. These apprenticeships cover almost all business functions in the industry – including engineering, passenger transport and digital technology – and are all ready to use. Rail-related apprenticeships sit among the 700+ apprenticeship standards that range from level 2 (GCSE level) to level 7 (Master's degree level).

Apprenticeships offer many opportunities to employers seeking to build various skill types and levels within their businesses. Apprentices develop the right skills for the business and are a great way to transfer knowledge to a new generation of talent. Degree apprenticeships help employers reach sixth formers looking for alternatives to full-time university routes. Apprenticeships can also help with up-skilling by offering existing staff progression opportunities and continued professional development.

Apprenticeships are a valuable means of bringing diverse talent into your business that is reflective of the communities rail serves. They are a valuable tool to offer employment opportunities to people from diverse backgrounds and a great way to respond to the call to action of the Levelling Up agenda and increase the social value of the rail industry.

Deciding to take on an apprentice is only the first step in the journey – setting up and delivering a quality apprenticeship is vital to successful skills development for the individual and your business. Apprenticeship set-up and delivery can be daunting. Processes and plans need to be developed for induction; training; relationship management between the business, the apprentice and training providers; maintaining apprentice wellbeing and end-point assessments need to be prepared. Staff must also be supported to provide quality training. There is a lot to organise and get right – but the benefits of the apprenticeship rely on a quality programme.

If you want to ensure that you are making the best use of apprenticeship opportunities and delivering a quality apprenticeship, **NSAR's dedicated team** is here to help.

- Using our workforce planning expertise, we can support you to evaluate where apprenticeships might benefit your workforce and how you can reinforce commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).
- We can provide support with navigating the apprenticeship standards currently offered, deciding which apprenticeship level is right for the skills you want to build in your workforce and optimising levies and funding.
- Our support also extends to assisting you to acquire the apprentice talent you need to reach your business goals.
- Utilise our expertise in designing apprenticeship programmes at whatever stage you are in – we can help with creating quality apprenticeships or reviewing and finding ways to make your existing programme work more effectively.

Contact NSAR to find out more about how we can help your business with apprenticeships.“

Photo credit: NSAR