

Go-Ahead invests for rebound in public transport by hiring more than 1,100 apprentices in 2021

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The Go-Ahead Group is set to hire more than 1,100 apprentices in 2021, demonstrating the company's commitment to invest in its workforce and plan for a recovery in public transport usage once COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

The company has more than doubled its ambitious target for its London bus operations, setting a goal of hiring 700 engineering and bus driving apprentices. In 2018, Go-Ahead London became the first UK transport operator to deliver bus driver apprenticeships in-house.

Meanwhile on Govia Thameslink Railway, the Group has set a target of hiring 200 apprentices in train driving, customer service and engineering.

Southeastern's apprenticeship target is 220. In 2020 Southeastern was named as one of the Top 100 Apprentice Employers in the UK – the only train operating company to make the Government shortlist.

The 2021 targets come ahead of this year's National Apprenticeship Week (8-14 February), which champions apprenticeships across all sectors. This year's theme – Build the Future – focuses on the importance of training and retaining apprenticeships and seeing an investment on return.

Apprenticeship programmes have been hit hard across numerous sectors due to Covid-19. According to the Department for Education, apprentice starts decreased by nearly 50 per cent during 2020.

By increasing its targets (from 700 in 2020), the Group hopes to hire even more of the talented people who have applied for roles since the start of the pandemic. Applications have reached record levels – doubling for rail roles, and up by a third for bus.

Go-Ahead's apprentice intake is exceptionally diverse. Nearly a fifth of London bus driver apprentices are over 50 years old and almost 70 per cent come from BAME backgrounds.

There is a particular focus on attracting and retaining women in transport. Of GTR's 2020 intake, 28 per cent were women. In addition, 17 per cent of Go-Ahead London's apprentice bus drivers are female – significantly above the 12 per cent national average for bus drivers.

To boost these numbers, the company runs a joint programme with Transport for London called 'Women with Drive', designed specifically to attract female bus driver apprentices. Women who have successfully completed the scheme include a former prison van driver and disabled charity worker.

Go-Ahead's Group People Director Scott Maynard said: "In spite of the pandemic, we will continue promoting and supporting our people. We will always need great people to drive our buses, maintain our trains and help passengers on their journeys.

"Go-Ahead is built on apprenticeship programmes- many of the senior leaders in our organisation began as apprenticeships themselves. These targets demonstrate our commitment to investing in people who will be fundamental to Go-Ahead's future."

Photo credit: Go-Ahead