

# How welfare units can improve onsite wellbeing and support staff retention

March 6, 2023



As the rail industry grapples with a skills crisis, organisations are beginning to recognise the importance of wellbeing and inclusion onsite. A 2021 Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) survey found that over 40% of rail workers were suffering from a mental health condition, which had a “hugely detrimental effect on their employers”, impacting cost, performance and safety. RSSB added that, while the COVID-19 pandemic likely contributed to this crisis, more must be done to support staff – with a focus on “workplace factors” and helping individuals who might be “socially excluded”.

## Wellbeing on Rail construction sites

In this way, employee wellbeing is paramount on rail construction sites, with mental health and burnout an important consideration.

And improving wellbeing isn’t just important from a duty-of-care perspective – it can also help employers to recruit diverse new talent, retain existing staff, and boost productivity. Indeed, RSSB reported that “sickness absence was five times higher (*in rail workers*) than the general population pre-COVID and six times higher than the general population during the pandemic” – figures that will undoubtedly impact

bottom lines.

Add to this the fact that rail still has a diversity problem (a 2021 Network Rail report found that just 3.9% of operations and maintenance staff are women), and it's clear that more can be done to make onsite environments safe, inclusive and positive.

### **Modern Welfare facilities improve wellbeing**

While onsite facilities (particularly welfare units) might seem like little more than a practical necessity, they can have a dramatic impact on wellbeing. Indeed, for team members working outdoors, a warm, dry and comfortable space can help make a big difference.

Traditional and older welfare facilities are often poorly maintained or lacking the space and comfort to allow workers to take a proper break onsite, contributing to the lack of support many feel at work – these are the “workplace factors” that, if improved, could transform culture and conditions onsite.

As such, it pays to invest in quality welfare units; with access to additional space, modern kitchen appliances, hygienic non-chemical water-flush WC facilities and enough power outlets, employees will be able to relax and recharge during downtime. Providing the right facilities could even encourage them to take breaks more regularly.



## **Larger welfare spaces promote positive culture**

Comfortable, spacious welfare units (like Welfare Hire's modern design range) also encourage workers to come together, sharing their experiences and building relationships. This is particularly important for new starters or those with disabilities – who, in RSSB's words, are at greater risk of being "socially excluded."

In its survey report, RSSB added that only half of those respondents suffering from a mental health condition sought help. Well-designed welfare units provide a safe, quiet space in which employees can talk and open up – whether that's to a colleague or line manager.

Indeed, the right welfare equipment won't just make workers more comfortable – it could help to foster a more positive culture onsite, boosting morale and improving staff retention rates.

## **Improving inclusivity onsite**

Providing better welfare facilities could even help to improve inclusivity onsite. Higher-end units often feature separate, hygienic toilets (Welfare Hire's units are fitted with ceramic water-flush WCs) or changing rooms for privacy.

Investing in providing the most modern and innovative welfare will send an important message to the workforce – this in turn creates ripple effects, leading to **improvements in productivity, employee inclusion, retention and overall staff morale**. And, with major projects like HS2 set to create thousands of new jobs in future, building a motivated and diverse workforce is more important than ever.

While improving wellbeing and inclusivity is a complex undertaking, the right welfare facilities can help to make rail construction sites a more positive, more inclusive and safer environment for workers. This, in turn, could have a positive impact on recruitment and staff retention – areas of focus for the industry, now more than ever.

