

# Investing in a new generation of rail talent

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*Barry Toms, operations manager at [Amaro](#), discusses the business's plans to invest in six new apprentices in 2023 - and explains why, for ambitious job seekers, the railway presents a unique opportunity.*

**Amaro's operations manager Barry Toms began his career as an apprentice - and now, he's helping others to do the same.**

Working closely with head of engineering John Waugh, Barry oversees the business's growing apprenticeship programme - which, he explained, has already delivered positive results.

## **Success stories**

"Amaro currently employs two apprentices, Rachael Lyas and Kurt Jenson," he said. "We did things slightly differently, taking on apprentices who were at later stages in their careers, rather than school leavers.

"Kurt is an incredibly hard worker, and had been in the industry for many years. He wanted someone to take a chance on him, which is what we've done. Today, he's completing a level three apprenticeship in signalling engineering. It will give him a strong foundation in installation, which he can work off and develop.

“Rachael is a planner and signalling apprentice. She was already working for us when she expressed an interest in moving out on track and undertaking an apprenticeship, and she’s doing fantastically – getting distinctions.”

Buoyed by Rachael and Kurt’s success, Barry is now preparing to welcome six new school and college leavers, all of whom will join the business as signalling apprentices.

### **Huge opportunities in rail**

It’s all part of Amaro’s drive to develop a new generation of rail professionals. In the face of an industry-wide skills shortage, rail businesses across the board have struggled to find the right calibre of people to fill their vacancies.

Barry acknowledged that, to help remedy this issue, the industry must make young people aware of the exciting and lucrative opportunities available within this sector. And, [with the National Skills Academy for Rail \(NSAR\) reporting that investment could create 12,000 new jobs per year over the next five to ten years](#), there’s never been a better time to start a career in rail.

“We’re focusing on young people who are going to be leaving education and would typically be looking at domestic and industrial electrical work,” he said. “When talking to them, I explain the benefits of a career in rail – that if they fancy something different, something with great prospects and earning potential, the railways are the place for them.

“And, at Amaro, that’s exactly what we provide. A seriously rewarding, well-paid career backed up by unlimited training, mentorship and promotion opportunities.”

He added that, without family or regional ties to the industry, most school leavers fail to consider a career in rail – something SMEs like Amaro must address.

### **A route into the rail industry**

Indeed, seasoned industry professional Barry is truly committed to helping job seekers find the right routes into rail.

“One of the reasons MD Micky and I are so passionate about apprenticeships is that we’re both from apprenticeship backgrounds,” he explained. “I was an electrical apprentice at 16, and I’ve progressed to operations manager after 25 years.

“Micky started out as a signalling apprentice, and today he’s the MD of a multi-million-pound business. If you give these young people the right tools, the right guidance and the right pathways –and if they’re ready to grab the opportunity with both hands – there’s no reason they can’t be the next operations managers, heads of engineering, or MDs.”

### **Nurturing tomorrow’s rail professionals**

But what does 'the right guidance' look like in practice? Barry explained that, for Amaro, it's about nurturing and supporting apprentices.

"We're big believers in helping them to become the best they can be," he said. "Throughout the business, there's a strong ethos of career and personal development.

"We draw up development plans, and our head of engineering John sits down with everyone individually and discusses their short, medium and long-term goals.

"It's the same with apprentices; we ask them where they see themselves in three years, and then 10 years. These objectives aren't set in stone, and they can review them every year."

With a clear development plan in place – and with both parties fully accountable – apprentices are more likely to achieve their career goals, and to remain with the business and within the industry as a whole. That's why Barry is always on hand to provide support, acting as line manager and mentor.

"Their signalling training is delivered through a learning provider, but I'm there for any day-to-day matters," he said. "I'll sit with the resource manager, making sure they're working on projects that will help them grow. I receive weekly reports on how they're doing, and if they need a couple of hours with me, I'll make time for a chat, putting whatever's needed in place to get them where they need – and want – to be."

He added that this approach doesn't just benefit apprentices – it also produces the kind of competent, motivated professionals Amaro is keen to employ.

"I think apprenticeships are the future of so many industries, but especially rail," he concluded. "You can invest in individuals, helping them to be the best person they can be, and that person will repay your investment many times over."

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