

# Network Rail look to inspire young people as ground-breaking STEM learning facility opens

February 14, 2020



Network Rail has opened a dedicated STEM learning facility with the aim of inspiring the next generation to pursue careers in the science, technology, engineering and maths sectors and help close skills gaps in vital areas across Britain.

Network Rail's chief executive Andrew Haines was joined by Stephen Metcalfe MP, who has chaired the Science and Technology Select Committee and serves as Member of Parliament for South Basildon and East Thurrock, to cut the ribbon at the new facility, which is housed within the company's national centre in Milton Keynes.

Industry partners from Engineering UK, the National Railway Museum, Primary Engineer, Women in Science and Engineering and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy also attended alongside Network Rail's ever-growing team of STEM ambassadors to celebrate the opening.

Andrew Haines, chief executive of Network Rail, said: "There is an estimated shortfall of as many as 59,000 engineers coming into the workforce via apprenticeships and higher education. Providing this kind of meaningful engagement with young people to address the issue is absolutely vital for the future of our railway and indeed for Britain.

"The opening of this new facility is a really exciting step, and we are keen to roll the initiative out further across the country as we try to inspire young people and improve the numbers and diversity of students pursuing careers in STEM fields."

The lab is a dedicated space where schoolchildren and community groups will be invited to take part in a range of STEM-based activities, including a virtual reality cube, which provides an immersive 3D experience of travelling in a train cab, moving between traditional to digital technologies.

The new facility will be used not only to improve engagement with local communities, universities and schools within the Milton Keynes area and beyond, but also to train Network Rail staff on sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm for STEM subjects as part of the company's STEM ambassador programme.

Network Rail employees also have the opportunity to use their five annual days of volunteer leave to pass on their skills to the next generation through STEM engagement in the lab.

Students from The Radcliffe School in Wolverton and Northampton International Academy were the first to experience the new facility this morning.

Stephen Metcalfe MP said: "I am delighted that Network Rail are tackling our national skills shortage head on. The opening of the STEM Lab to help increase the businesses engagement activity has the potential to help engage young people from all backgrounds and show that there is a place for them in the vitally important engineering sector regardless of gender, ethnicity or background.

"I wish the project well and hope to see ever more people demonstrating that engineering is not only vital to our future success but a rewarding, creative and fulfilling career."

Melanie Beck, chief executive of MyMiltonKeynes, said: "The launch of this exciting new facility in Central Milton Keynes is testament to the city's position within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, and our prioritisation of STEM sector engagement between businesses and educational facilities."

*Photo credit: Network Rail*