

Why the Rail Industry must tackle a shortage of trainers sooner rather than later

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The rail sector is experiencing a skills shortage which, if unchecked, will limit its ability for future growth. The looming skills shortage brings with it significant challenges, from potential safety concerns to project delays, increased costs and reduced ability to meet demand and deliver an efficient rail operation to name a few.

These issues will increase in the coming years unless action is taken to tackle them. Almost 50,000 rail sector employees are expected to retire by 2030, leaving behind a void which is being filled by often older workers, with the proportion of under 25-year-olds making up just 5 percent of the rail sector's workforce.^[1]

Meanwhile, the introduction of digital technologies is creating a wealth of rail staff who need upskilling. It is estimated that approximately 80 percent of the industry will require training over the next two decades,

with around 200,000 needing some form of training.^[ii] But delivering training across such a vast amount of workers is easier said than done, and the issue is exacerbated by a lack of qualified trainers able to deliver it.

Trainers are the driving force behind the UK's rail network, ensuring that new and existing employees are well-equipped with the necessary skills to keep our trains running. Without enough trainers, it becomes challenging to bring in new talent and integrate them into the workforce. This lack of flexibility limits the industry's ability to adapt to new technologies and methods, hindering innovation, which is a top priority for QTS.



Since the demise of British Rail and other major companies, workers are moving away from the rail industry for a variety of reasons, The main factor being financial, with recent changes to tax regulations for contingent labourers prompting many people to move to other industries instead. There is also a lack of awareness and interest from younger generations in pursuing a career in this field, which in turn limits the availability of prospective trainers as there is little influx of new talent entering the sector.

Meanwhile, the process of accreditation to become an approved rail safety trainer can be challenging and a lengthy process, leading people to question if it is worth it. Some trainee trainers start the journey, only to give up before reaching the stage of approval. During the upskilling process potential trainers are unable to directly deliver training, making this a considerable investment for any training provider organisation.

Industry conversations are currently being held with Network Rail on how to speed up the accreditation process, without reducing the quality of training, and encourage more people to consider this as a career. To improve the efficiency of the process and bring more skilled trainers to the industry, they need to do more in addition to basic PTS training. For example, if accredited training providers were able to host training events and workshops, people could potentially come out after a number of weeks as a qualified PTS trainer.

Creating a structured training program that empowers people to succeed in the industry should also be placed high on the agenda for the sector. Many individuals who are drawn to the rail industry tend to be kinaesthetic learners who prefer hands-on learning experiences. Therefore, the typical classroom setting can be a challenging transition and may even be intimidating for them.

Unless the aforementioned issues are addressed, a lack of trained workers could put a strain on existing employees as they take on additional responsibilities and run the risk of burnout. Inadequate training can increase the risk of accidents, with comprehensive, quality, training essential to teaching safety protocols, emergency procedures, and how to operate equipment.



Training is an essential cog in the rail network machine and something which QTS is placing an onus on as it looks to develop the next generation of skilled workers across the sector. Providing NSAR Gold Rated training centres throughout the UK, which include state-of-the-art classrooms as well as an on-site 700m

practical double line railway training track with a full OLE training span, as well as rope access and confined space tunnel system allows the delivery of multiple learnings across all areas. QTS aims to create an environment which is enjoyed by trainers and trainees alike.

The majority of people consider a career in rail training later on in life, usually from the age of thirty onwards. QTS is fortunate enough to have a number of people in their twenties coming through, and so the company is supporting and investing in them to give them everything they need to develop their expertise and provide a new generation of rail trainers.

With trainers in short supply across the sector, this is something which organisations across the rail sector should do as a priority. Failure to do so will only see the lack of skilled workers increase.

[i]
<https://www.nsar.co.uk/2022/09/addressing-skills-shortages-in-the-rail-industry-through-investment-in-people-and-skills/>

[ii] *ibid*