

Rail Companies celebrate achievement of 10,000 NVQ awards

“It’s a tribute to the rail sector for having done this and it’s a practical contribution to the strategy Government is laying out in the ambitious new skills and apprenticeships legislation outlined in the recent Queen’s Speech.”

Gordon Marsden MP

Gordon Marsden is Chair of the All Party Skills Group and member of the Select Committee on Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills.



They say it takes more than a helpful tank engine and a man with a big hat to run a railway and nothing could have been clearer when train and tram operators, infrastructure engineers and specialist railway suppliers gathered with Four Counties Training to celebrate training achievements in the House of Commons two weeks before Christmas. The event, hosted by Gordon Marsden MP, marked the achievement of 10,000 Rail Transport NVQ awards by the staff of 21 rail companies.

The commended companies have more in common than a shared interest in guided transport systems. All have chosen to benchmark front line staff competence with National Occupational Standards and to issue NVQ awards in partnership with the Rail Competence Centre to evidence individual achievement. Benefits to individual members of staff were highlighted by inspiring experiences of eight people selected for outstanding achievement and contribution to their companies’ competence assurance achievements:

- Matthew Emery EDF Energy
- Angela Baugh London Midland Railway
- Lucyna Bacht-Matlak London Underground Ltd
- Roch Evelyn Metronet Rail
- Garry Shanahan National Express Travel Midland Metro
- Steve Butler South West Trains
- Jamie Bell Tube Lines
- Abigail Belcher Westinghouse Rail Systems Ltd



Their Certificates were presented by Philippa Langton, Regional Director of Skills at the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), who said:

“This is a remarkable achievement in skills and training in the rail industry that is the result of excellent partnership work between learners, employers and LSC funded training providers, particularly the innovative work provided by Four Counties Training. This successful partnership presents us with a working model and bright example of how publicly-funded training provision such as Train to Gain and Apprenticeships can work with employers and can respond positively and effectively to industry needs.”

The Rail Competence Centre is based in Ealing, West London and is led by Four Counties Training (FCT) Ltd. in partnership with Barnet College. The Centre has developed a highly streamlined approach to workplace NVQs that takes account of the first class training and assessment practice already in place to eliminate duplication and keep paperwork to a minimum.

George McNulty, London Underground’s Service Director, explained the importance of the programme to his company:

“Our NVQ programme is a key plank in our operational proposition. It helps to define us as a customer service organisation, committed to maintaining and improving our standards of delivery through our well trained staff.”

This was echoed independently by Aoua Konate, a Customer Service Assistant (CSA) following the London Underground employability programme, who said:

“Working towards my NVQ is helping me to improve the skills and knowledge needed to provide exceptional customer service. I am learning by doing the job and getting more experience. It is also useful for my employer, London Underground, as it proves to them that I do have the skills and knowledge they need in a CSA.”



Participating companies have also noted other benefits. Independent verification and quality assurance provides an external “seal of approval” for approaches in use and disseminates best practice between companies. “I knew we had it right when the City and Guilds Verifier told us our assessments were amongst the best he had ever seen”, said Trefor Williams of Westinghouse Rail Systems Ltd.

The National Occupational Standards for rail operations and engineering are maintained by Go Skills, the Sector Skills Council for passenger transport. City and Guilds’ Rail Transport NVQ series offers awards in most industry job roles combined with a highly supportive, “industry

friendly” approach to workplace assessment and evidencing competence. The operations group covers jobs within driving, signal operations and passenger service whilst the engineering group covers maintenance and installation of railway assets including track, signals, electrification and rolling stock. Other City and Guilds awards are used to accredit staff working in design or maintaining lifts, pumps and escalators.

Roch Evelyn, a permanent way maintainer with Metronet Rail emphasised the benefits of additional support available from FCT. In gaining his “first ever qualification”, Roch said, “They gave me 1-1 support with my learning needs and dyslexia. Getting the NVQ and recognising my dyslexia has helped me to feel more confident and positive about taking tests during training courses.”



FCT’s Rail Competence Centre is described as the “one stop shop” for competence assurance and NVQs because of its comprehensive service matching company practices to NVQ requirements, overseeing the award of qualifications to staff and securing external funding to offset client company costs. The all-through service includes materials design, mapping to NVQ standards and administration and verification services for awards at all levels from front line staff to senior managers as well as bespoke training for trainers, assessors and verifiers.

Awards made by the Rail Competence Centre to the participating companies account for 83% of all rail transport NVQs awarded by City and Guilds nationally. Lara Newson, FCT’s Managing Director, said: “This is a real landmark for FCT and the companies we work with. The rail industry was criticised for poor NVQ achievement less than 10 years ago but now we’ve passed 10,000 awards in 21 companies. Given the rate of take up of the FCT model, we expect the next 10,000 will be achieved in even less time.”

The LSC actively supports the FCT model and rail company NVQ achievements by funding a significant part of the service provided. By linking payment to the achievement of specified requirements and high success rates that are subsequently confirmed through audit and Ofsted inspection, the LSC also drives improvement and the achievement of very high standards in delivery. FCT and Barnet College have both achieved the new Training Quality Standard and FCT was awarded “Outstanding” status in a 2008 Ofsted inspection for achieving grade 1 in all areas.