



Supplying the next generation of signal engineers

As we steadily approach the conclusion of the first year of Control Period 5 (April 2014-March 2019), the forecasted peak in engineering shortages – predicted to hit the hardest around 2016/17 - is creeping ever closer and is likely to affect the whole rail industry.

NSARE (the National Skills Academy for Railway Engineering) released its report 'Forecasting the Skills Challenge' in early 2013. This predicted that, in order to overcome the subsequent difficulties, around 10,000 people would be required for industry training between 2014 and 2018 – predominantly in the signalling sector.

Linbrooke steps forward

This set a challenge for the industry as a whole and various initiatives were adopted. One of the first organisations to respond was Linbrooke Services of Sheffield and the result is its newly-opened, state-of-the-art, National Training Academy (NTA).

With an aging workforce and the demand for signalling testers being at an all-time high, the National Training Academy is primarily geared up for providing training for signalling works testing. The new site's authentic platform and tracks incorporate various styles of signals, point operating equipment and train detection and protection equipment. These provide a realistic and accessible set-up for safe and practical training from basic appreciation right through to high-level modular testing competence. In order to enhance the learning experience, the signalling facility also incorporates associated power and communications equipment.

A combination of legacy and traditional equipment, as well as the flashing aspects associated with high-speed turnouts, gives

Linbrooke's new academy the ability to offer more than just theoretical and on-par practical training.

Operating under the ntrs banner, a wide variety of 'off the shelf' and bespoke courses are on offer. Indications are that the academy will see a steady influx of fresh apprentices and trainees as well as industry organisations looking to upskill their workforces.

Over the next three to five years, Linbrooke and ntrs intend to register 100 apprentices from the local community alone – with others travelling from further afield to take advantage of the new centre's expertise.

Experience and expertise

The training team has a wealth of knowledge and expertise in signalling systems so is able to offer a basic understanding across the complete signalling spectrum. This ensures that graduates can recognise and properly operate all pertinent systems nation-wide. Under one of the industry's acknowledged experts, Mike Smith, Linbrooke can now offer both traditional and exclusive courses. These include Signalling Works Testing courses from Mod 5 (Test Assistant) through to Mod 3BL/4 (Functional Tester) as well as the exclusive testing management training course Mod 1 (Tester in Charge) and training in SWT G110.

Further enhancements to the facilities are already in the pipeline. The centre will soon have an integrated interlocking to further train principles testers.

With the majority of other training facilities concentrating their efforts on specific subdivisions of signalling, Linbrooke's National Training Academy is unusual in its widespread offering of signalling knowledge and experience, as well as telecommunications and power, so providing high-calibre training across the board. While opening the new academy, Pete Waterman – music entrepreneur, railway enthusiast and Patron of NSARE - pleaded for 'more centres like this please.'

The Secretary of State for Transport, Patrick McLoughlin, also endorsed the new National Training Academy as an asset to the signalling sector, the industry and the nation.

"In order to build a world-class railway you need a world-class workforce," he said. "With an engineering industry that is recognised around the globe, South Yorkshire is the perfect home for the trackside National Training Academy.

"As part of our long-term economic plan, we're investing record amounts in the UK's railways by generating jobs and training opportunities. This new academy will ensure the local people in Chapelton see the benefits of this investment, as well as developing a lasting legacy for the future. I sincerely congratulate Lee Hallam and everyone involved in bringing this project to fruition." ●





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