

## **RailStaff Awards speech – 17 October 2009**

Good evening everyone, and many thanks Adrian for that introduction.

It's great to be here again this evening at the RailStaff Awards and a delight to see so many colleagues together – on an evening when we recognise the hard work, commitment and professionalism of railmen and women across the country.

But tonight also gives us all a chance to remember something which in our everyday lives we sometimes forget – that we work in a fantastic sector that makes a real difference to people's lives.

Daily we help millions of passengers to go to work or study, meet friends and family, or just get out and have fun.

What we do underpins economic growth, sustains social bonds and boosts the nation's well being.

And we have been going through a phenomenal time for passenger rail in this country, when major improvements to the network have generated an explosion in train travel.

We have had a busy year since I spoke at last year's Awards. Among the plethora of high level announcements on such things as high speed rail and electrification, we must always remember that the railway is primarily a people industry. And it is you – the people who work in it – that make it such a great industry to be in.

That, in a funny sort of way, is emphasised by some of the people stories of the past year. Sir Richard Branson dressing up (or down maybe) for a Virgin advertising campaign. The kissing ban at Warrington Bank Quay. And six year old Sam Pointon being appointed as the Director of Fun at the National Railway Museum.

Tonight, before we settle down to enjoy our dinner, I want to tell you briefly about some of the ways in which ATOC and train companies are committed to supporting and sponsoring people in the railways.

Network Rail, as our fellow Associate Sponsor for tonight, of course does an enormous amount in this area and I know that Iain Coucher is personally committed to the whole area of staff development. Train operators, too, invest in your future to ensure that the railway not only has the necessary skills and know-how needed, but is also able to offer the chance of a satisfying and worthwhile career.

Of course, TOCs undertake a whole range of training activity – over 240,000 days per year - in all sorts of areas including customer service, retail, operations and safety, depot engineering and general management skills. But I want to focus briefly on three different ways in which the industry is providing real support in developing railway staff.

Let me outline the ATOC professional engineering development scheme **first**, known as **APEDS**.

This enables train operators and other member organisations, including Network Rail, to offer graduate engineer recruits the opportunity to obtain high quality training on a professional development scheme.

The training on offer is for those graduates seeking a long term career in the railway industry and enables them to become registered with the Engineering Council UK as either Chartered or Incorporated Engineers.

The industry has a lot to offer to Graduate Engineers and for the right people it can provide a fulfilling and challenging career.

Each trainee is allocated to a mentor - a senior engineer - who monitors his or her progress and provides professional counselling and advice.

In addition to that, train operators take on undergraduates whilst still at university, enabling them to have a year's railway industry work experience.

The scheme is built on the contribution of people with a good, hands-on, understanding of engineering fundamentals and self motivation – as well as the ability to innovate, work well in a team and apply engineering knowledge in an intensely practical environment. It is a really good way to gain a professional qualification and lead into a fruitful and challenging career on the railway.

2008 was a record year for recruitment into the scheme, which was a runner-up in the Passenger Transport Management Awards in June. There have been a total of 68 graduates through the scheme since it started.

The **second** initiative has arisen from a wish, shared by senior figures at ATOC and Network Rail, to nurture the next generation of operations staff who will increasingly take on the mantle from colleagues retiring and leaving the industry over the coming years.

The latter have a key perspective on the industry overall and much of their knowledge and experience was developed when Britain's railway was managed as a single organisation.

We have therefore recently started an operations secondment scheme where TOC and Network Rail staff can take up substantive roles in the other part of the industry, so that they can see and appreciate better how things are done elsewhere.

We believe that this will lead to a greater understanding of the industry as a whole and therefore to more joined-up thinking and working, which is, after all, what our customers want and expect of us.

The scheme is starting at a modest level but it has industry-wide support - and it will, we believe, lead to a greater appreciation of the issues and difficulties that our partners face on a day to day basis.

The **third** area I want to highlight is the proposal for a National Skills Academy for Rail Engineering. Initial work, done for a consortium of industry players including ATOC and Network Rail and led by RIA, suggests that an Academy could have a valuable role to play because engineering skills in all sectors of the industry will be in short supply in coming years.

The intention is for an Academy to focus on accrediting training providers, helping rail businesses to find the right quality training, carrying out skills' forecasts, defining training needs and promoting the rail industry as a great place to work.

Work is now under way to develop a business case and identify potential sources of funding, including from the Government to provide for its start up and some of its running costs. With a fair wind the hope is that the Academy

could be operational in early 2011.

So I hope you can see that we are all making a serious investment in the people who work in the rail industry.

Our commitment is to develop and nurture talent, to ensure we have the skills and know-how we need.

Tonight is about recognising the best of that talent, those who go the extra mile.

And in doing so, let us remember that this evening we can all feel proud, proud that we play our part in providing a service that fulfils such a fundamental role in the life of the country.

Thank you and enjoy the rest of the evening.