



Haven't we forgotten the people?

Occasionally we can hear such questions: haven't we forgotten the signalman? Haven't we forgotten the driver? Haven't we forgotten the maintainer? Etc... In short, haven't we forgotten the people?

Railway signalling IS people

Railway signalling is not "plug and play". Railway signalling is a system. It is an interconnected system that has interfaces all over the place. And the rail transport business involves also infrastructure, track works, electrification, rolling stock, telecommunications, etc... All areas that need people; and specialised people ("experts") who are of paramount importance from their design to the commissioning and the operation, and all along the life of the system for 30 to 40 years or more.

Railway signalling involves a full range of products, with many items of various sorts and for various goals, and, for the people in charge, it is therefore more "delicate" to fully appreciate railway signalling than more "stand alone" products, such as a locomotive or a piece of track for instance.

Rail safety involves three kinds of items: not only signalling products (from the train detection products to the interlockings), but also specific operational rules and, last but not least, people, who are trained and who precisely respect the rules, in all situations and without any question. Railway people indeed make a key contribution to rail operation and to rail safety.

Technology changes mean a cultural revolution

For the railway signalling profession, technology changes, and the ways to tackle them, now seem often not to be efficient; at least not as they should be. In fact, it seems rather that, the more modern the equipment, the worse its reliability; at least during the first years of operation.

How to keep his role to the human being?

So, people have indeed a key role, several key roles in fact, in many areas of the rail business. It is important that training courses are not only at a "system" and theoretical level, but that they go down to reality and to the practical side and involve common sense... and, as a matter of fact, it is not only training that is needed but, at the same time, power for operational decisions must be given to the people at the right level, where things happen, where people are on duty...

Railway signalling training should also pass sharp messages; such as: "railway signalling is a profession, not only a job"; and: "to work in rail safety, it is compulsory to know, first hand, how railway signalling works and why". Railway signalling is maybe, also, a way of thinking. That is why people are so important in this area.

So, in short, "Do not forget the people".

*Jacques PORÉ, IRSE Past President 2005-2006
for the IRSE NEWS Team*

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In this Issue ...

	Page
Integrated Communications & Security Systems Claire Porter	2
Book Review: The Classic Railway Signal Tower	12
Technical Visit to Belgium Ian Bridges	13
Industry News	16
Interesting Signals No.98: Quorn & Woodhouse Ian Allison	18
Curiosity Corner	18
IRSE Matters ERTMS Conference	19
Exam Results	22
Ties and Badges	23
ECUK UK Engineering Conference Report	24
Section News: Midland & North Western 25 York 26 Western 27	27
Australasian: 60th Anniversary Celebrations	28
Scottish	33
Feedback	34
Membership Matters	37
Recruitment	inside front and outside back covers