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By the time you read this, I, like many of our colleagues in the UK, will be recruiting for apprentices - an exciting but challenging time!

The rail industry is changing at an incredible pace, which nobody could have predicted 20-odd years ago when I started with BR, for example the onset of the Digital Railway, high speed lines and reduced access times for maintenance and infrastructure projects. We need a workforce that will be able to adapt and thrive on the changes, one that has sufficient knowledge to understand why things work (or don't) and also one that has real work experience. Employing apprentices now will provide part of this adaptable and knowledgeable workforce, as will a range of other early careers (entry level) opportunities.

This can be a hard task at times! The apprenticeship pathway chosen must suit our businesses, now and in the future. The business case must add up to ensure sufficient investment. Recruitment needs to reach out to as diverse an audience as possible to bring in the best candidates. During recruitment, we need to spot the potential in CVs which range from those still in full time education to those already in work, but perhaps have not found their 'calling' yet. Once the successful candidates step into work, the challenge continues: the apprentices need to learn on the job, so supervisors must also be tutors and mentors; they do not have IRSE licences immediately, so can not be deemed competent but there is pressure to get them productive; they need work to do even when the contracts are not being won.

However this is our chance as an industry to provide the opportunity for these apprentices to gain the grounding which will prepare them for a long and varied career, at all levels, as I predict some of my current apprentices will be technical and business leaders in the future.

Please support all early careers people who cross your path and help us provide information to potential candidates for roles within the System Railway showing what a stimulating career they could find themselves in.

**Judith Ward**

**Head of Technical Resource Development, Transportation, Atkins**



Front Cover: Practical training on the preparation of fibre splicing at Linbrooke Services and NTRS' National Training Academy in Ecclesfield, Sheffield. Photo: Phil Adams.

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