



All-inclusive apprenticeship schemes for Network Rail

Encouraging diversity to keep engineering on track

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Background

Network Rail owns, operates and develops Britain's railway infrastructure. The organisation manages 20 of the UK's largest stations, 20,000 miles of track, and thousands more bridges, tunnels, viaducts, signals and level crossings.

Network Rail exists to get people and goods where they need to be, running a safe, reliable and efficient service that helps support the country's economy. With a planned investment of £45bn over the next five years, they're dedicated to discovering a future-proof workforce.

Objective

Network Rail are committed to becoming one of the country's preferred early talent employers. They wanted to attract, develop and retain their next generation of employees through an apprenticeship scheme that encouraged diversity, especially among women.

The organisation needed an innovative recruitment programme that recognised potential to hire 214 apprentices – independent of background, experience and age – across 104 different locations. They were equally driven by their ambition of meeting a gender diversity target of 20% female engineers in 2020.

Removing any unconscious bias from their attraction and selection process was another purpose of our continuing partnership with Network Rail – ensuring that all applicants were given equal consideration.

Network Rail understood that inspiring apprenticeship schemes would create a larger, more diverse talent pool. And, with demand for engineers outweighing interest within the sector, the organisation wanted to promote apprenticeships as an attractive way for candidates to fast-track successful careers with them.

Apprentices learn valuable and transferrable skills while they earn, and research has shown that most stay with their employers after their programmes have finished.

Solution

To create a diverse talent pool that represented more females and those from BAME groups, we worked closely with Network Rail to reimagine their recruitment programme.

Our innovative strategy was designed to attract all types of people into engineering roles. We created an engaging and informative process, which wasn't prone to the partiality that had undermined previous campaigns. The new apprentice recruitment process included:

- A streamlined registration and application form that was slick, focused and concise with clear signposting for candidates every step of the way.
- A Situational Judgement Test (SJT), presented across a wide range of media, to introduce candidates to realistic scenarios that they may face as an apprentice.
- A pre-assessment coaching call designed to prepare candidates for assessment centre exercises while ensuring they remained excited and interested.
- Digital assessment centres that comprised of a group exercise, an interview and an individual exercise with trained professionals and which were supported by automated, personalised feedback.

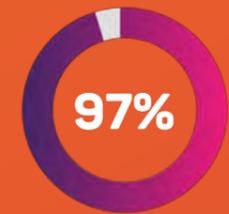
Network Rail wanted at least 10% of new apprentice engineers to be women. We helped promote their initiative at careers events, particularly focusing on dates such as International Women's Day. Our campaign also emphasised flexible working times and a revised maternity project that was more attractive to females.

Results

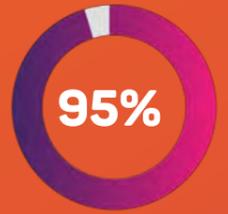
By improving their future talent recruitment process, Network Rail managed to fill an outstanding 97% of roles for their September 2019 intake. A total of 322 candidates passed the assessment centres – increasing from 301 last year.

The organisation also reported an increase in the calibre of candidates reaching the assessment centre stage. And, 75% of those that completed the apprentice scheme chose to go into employment with Network Rail, compared to the national average of 55% for engineering.

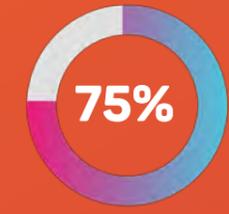
We also helped to increase the number of BAME and female applicants, and the retention of these targeted groups, during the recruitment campaign. Candidate experience – using Net Promoter Scores (NPSs) at every stage – delivered an impressive overall score of +78, way above the average of +24. And, in a highly competitive industry, Network Rail achieved an impressive 95% retention rate after the first year compared to a national average of 59%.



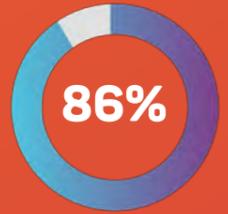
97% Of apprentice engineer roles filled (Sept, 2019)



95% Of selected candidates remained in the role after the first year



75% Of apprentices stayed with Network Rail after completing the scheme



86% Of offers accepted, compared to 79% the previous year

Client quote

"Our new approach has been hugely successful and the results we've achieved in partnership with Amberjack speak for themselves."

Group Talent Acquisition Manager, Network Rail

Candidate quote

"Despite having no prior experience of engineering, I felt supported throughout the recruitment process. My favourite part was the assessment centre as it reflected the values of Network Rail and suited all abilities independent of experience."

Level 3 Apprentice Engineering Technician

