

# All-inclusive apprenticeship schemes for Network Rail

Encouraging diversity to keep engineering on track

## Background

Network Rail manages 20 of the UK's largest train stations, 20,000 miles of track, and thousands of bridges, tunnels, viaducts, signals and level crossings. As the owner, operator and developer of Britain's railway infrastructure, Network Rail needs safe, reliable, and efficient service that helps support the country's economy.

Network Rail exists to get people and goods where they need to be, with a planned investment of £45bn over five years, they are dedicated to discovering a future-proof workforce that can help deliver this.

## Objectives

Network Rail are committed to being a first-choice early talent employer. Yet, with demand for engineers outweighing interest in the sector, the organisation wanted to take action to promote apprenticeships as an attractive way for candidates to fast-track successful careers with them.

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 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.

They wanted to remove any unconscious bias from their attraction and selection process, another reason for Amberjack's continuing partnership with Network Rail – to ensure that all applicants were given equal consideration.

## Solutions

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

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, using a focused and concise approach 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 which were supported by automated, personalised feedback.
- As 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.

## Impact

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.

An amazing 75% of individuals 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, measured using Net Promoter Scores (NPS) at every stage, delivered an impressive overall score of +78, way above the average of +24.

Additionally, a highly competitive industry, Network Rail achieved an impressive 95% retention rate after the first year compared to a national average of 59%.

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