



Rail starts to play its part in helping young people bounce back

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Rail employers are now starting to embrace the Department for Work and Pensions' Kickstart Scheme, creating the opportunities so desperately needed for young people.

Recent Office for National Statistics data showed that in January 2021 the number of employees on payroll had fallen by 726,000 since the COVID-19 pandemic began in February 2020. Three out of five of these job losses were from people under the age of 25. We have yet to see what happens when furlough finally must come to an end.

What must also be of concern now is the lack of opportunity for individuals to get back on their feet and to bounce back. This is a factor not just for those unemployed young people but also for young people leaving school, college or university. These would otherwise be the new entrants to the labour market. All risk being confronted by a paucity of opportunity.

We can play a part in creating and offering opportunity; we have some agency here. We can make a difference and offer a helping hand to change how the economy confronts those in need of economic opportunity. We can make it less of a confrontation and more of a way in (or a way back in). As we start to think about how we bounce back, enabled by the successes of the vaccination programme now rolling through the population, we can also now think about how we can help to take others in need of opportunity with us.

The Kickstart scheme allows us as a sector to stretch out a helping hand to those at risk of long-term unemployment and to offer them the opportunity to gain valuable work experience in our sector, helping them on their journey back into employment. Kickstart provides employers with all the support funding necessary to create six-month job placements for those 16- to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. This contains the group that has been worst hit economically and all these young people risk facing an opportunity deficit. This is also one of the groups that may have to live with the pandemic aftershocks the longest.

The Kickstart programme got off to a bit of a slow start but more and more employers are now starting to show up. Early adoption of Kickstart by rail employers has been very encouraging and more are now starting to ask how they can get involved. Rail employers can spread the start date of the Kickstart job placements up until the end of December 2021. So, there is still plenty of time to get involved, if you haven't had time to consider taking part.



Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Thérèse Coffey has pointed out that, “Now is the time to prepare for post-lockdown placements and employers will now have a choice to apply direct or through one of our fantastic Kickstart gateways who may be locally connected or sector-specific providing that tailored support.”

The National Skills Academy for Rail is your Kickstart gateway but if you want to be able to do it yourself, as an employer, we will be happy to provide you with some pointers on how to do this too.

To help you set up Kickstart opportunities, the government is providing £1,500 per Kickstart placement to cover set-up costs for things like providing employability support and delivering funded activities like IT set-up costs, administration and management time supporting participants to develop work skills and experience, and even uniforms, equipment, and PPE. Beyond helping with the start-up costs, Kickstart provides full funding for a period of 6 months, for each Kickstart participant working 25-hours per week.

The Kickstart programme pays 100% of the National Minimum Wage or the National Living Wage (dependent upon the age of the participant), associated employer National Insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment pension contributions. It is up to employers whether you pay a higher rate of salary or offer more than 25 hours work per week.

Kickstart funding is only available for job placements that are referred by the Department for Work and Pensions and are employed using the Kickstart Scheme process.

We know that there are skills shortages in the rail sector, we often talk about challenges in attracting the talent and we often reflect on worrying statistics that show how far we have to go to achieve the levels of diversity in our workforce that are seen in our customer base.

Kickstart does offer an opportunity to help in our push to address these issues. Whether it is a general push in creating opportunities across the business or a more targeted intervention that focuses on key areas of operation where we know we need to recruit, Kickstart can help. It has a role to play in setting up progression into working roles, into apprenticeships or in just offering high-quality and valuable work experience and access to a wage that will make a big difference to those in need of the opportunity. We are where we are' (as people often say) but where we are means that there is lot of well credentialled and experienced young people on Universal Credit.

'We need to access this talent. However, we also need to acknowledge that this means that it will be even harder for some to compete even for a chance to access the Kickstart opportunities. So, we need to try and make sure Kickstart offers an opportunity to all and that in our attempts to make sure no one is left behind, no one gets left behind. In what seems to be the 'modern way' I now feel strangely compelled to create a hash tag to trend like #mindfulkickstarting. I'll resist the temptation.

